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***Teachers' Beliefs about the Teaching of Reading
in Early Years Settings***

Volume 1 of 2

by

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Doctor of Philosophy (Education)**

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Declaration

I declare that, to the best of my knowledge, the material contained herein is original, except where explicitly stated otherwise. This thesis has not been submitted for a degree at another university.

Abstract

Although the necessity for the young child to become a confident reader in the early years of schooling is indisputable, we are less in agreement about the ways in which teachers might best achieve that. Approaching reading as part of subject matter knowledge, and providing a hierarchy of the concepts, understandings and skills that children need to acquire in order to read successfully, may be one way of facilitating practitioners' 'reflection in action'. (Schön, 1987)

With this in mind, the project reported here studied the beliefs held by various types of early years teachers/workers about the teaching of reading and the relationships between these beliefs and their teaching practices.

Through the use of one hundred and sixty questionnaires, nine interviews and nine observations, this thesis discusses the following questions: Do early years teachers use a theoretical framework in their instructional approach to teaching reading? If so, is there a relationship between their theoretical orientations toward reading development and their pedagogical practices?

This study suggests that offering subject-matter related training to early years practitioners, that for the scope of this study includes an understanding of the reading process, could lead them to make informed decisions about curriculum content. This in turn could enable them to offer a clear rationale behind what they consider as developmentally appropriate practice and what they actually do in the classroom.

Teachers' Beliefs about the Teaching of Reading in Early Years Settings

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

‘Early childhood professionals are being asked to promote high levels of achievement among all children, respond sensitively and appropriately to a wide array of student needs, implement complex pedagogy, *have a deep understanding of subject-matter disciplines, engage in serious reflection about their practices,* and work collaboratively with colleagues and families.’ (Bowman et al., 2001 (p.261)) [my emphasis]

The above quote attempted to highlight some of the skills and knowledge that parents and policy makers expect early childhood professionals to demonstrate. The aim of this thesis is to discuss early years teachers’ perceptions about the teaching of reading as part of their subject-matter knowledge.

The researcher subscribes to the definition of beliefs authored by Harvey (1986) who argued that beliefs are ‘a set of conceptual representations which signify to its holder

a reality or given state of affairs of sufficient validity, truth or trustworthiness to warrant reliance upon it as a guide to personal thought and action'. (p.660)

Furthermore the term 'early childhood education and care' does not have an agreed definition. 'It includes all arrangements providing care and education for children under compulsory school age regardless of setting, funding, opening hours or programme content. The early childhood period is commonly defined as birth to age eight.' (OECD, 2001 (p.14)) In this research 'early years', or the related term of pre-school education, includes children aged from three to the end of their Reception Year (aged five/six).

I chose to focus on teachers' beliefs within the context of teaching reading in the early years for a number of reasons. Being part of a family of teachers and having been trained as an early years teacher, I have an interest and a commitment to this sector of the education service. This thesis is my attempt to better understand my own experiences as an early years teacher and inform my practice for the immediate future through the experiences of others who teach young children.

In addition, recent publications in the early years field are wide ranging in their discussion of early years policy, practice or effective teaching of the core subjects of the curriculum (see for example Pugh, 2001; Browne, 1998; Riley, 2003; Abbott and Moylett, 1999; Whitehead, 2002; and Edington, 2004), but rarely are the beliefs, experiences and understandings of practising teachers the focus of such discussions. Contrary to this the 'Principles into Practice' project (Blenkin and Kelly, 1997)

aimed, as part of its data gathering strategy, to elicit the views of practitioners on what might constitute quality provision in the early years. It showed practitioners' (teachers and other adults working with young children) stories to be narratives of self-identity and culture that ask, 'Who are we?', 'How did we get here?', 'Where are we going?' and 'What are our shared beliefs?' (pp.60/61)

Moreover, in the last decade a series of reforms have occurred to the education system in England and Wales. Recent research into primary teaching (Osborn et al., 2000) has focused on these reforms, which have taken little account of early years teachers' perspectives, and the effects such changes might have upon practitioners and their work. Although the impact that the introduction of the Curriculum Guidance for the Foundation Stage (QCA 2000) and other reforms such as the Birth to Three Matters Framework (Sure Start Unit 2002), or the Foundation Stage Profile (QCA 2003) are having upon early years education is acknowledged, this thesis hopes to provide a more comprehensive view of early years teachers' work and argue that disregarding their views and experiences when planning for educational reforms threatens the successful implementation of them.

Furthermore, there is a tendency to use the term 'educator', Dowling (2000), and present early years professionals as a homogeneous group regardless of their background and qualifications. This results in two main themes repeatedly dominating discussions about early years education. One is a concern for children's social, physical and emotional well-being, and the other is a concern for their

learning and development. Although the general public, the policy makers, and many of the writers in this field regard care, health and education as being inextricably linked and subscribe to the notion of developing 'the whole child', this research indicates that 'using umbrella terms and calling everything by the same name does not make things the same. At present there are still massive differences between levels of expertise and provision in the early years.' (Dowling, 2000 (p.x)) This research suggests that early years practitioners who work in the private sector have different educational philosophies and practices, different values and motivations compared to those who work in schools. These differences are acknowledged by practitioners and result in divisions amongst the profession and the practices that are followed.

At the same time, this research has been conducted when the effective integration of services is considered to be the way forward in early years provision. Government incentives such as Sure Start bring together health, early learning and parental support in order to meet the needs of parents, children and the community they live in. The Five Year Policy for Children and Learners (DfES 2004) suggested that early years provision should not only be flexible and available, but also of a high standard. Documents such as Every Child Matters (DfES 2004) included 'enjoying and achieving' as one of the five outcomes for children and young people and were given legal force by the Children's Act 2004 as the components of well-being and the purpose of co-operation between agencies. Creating an environment that children enjoy while offering activities that will help them develop skills that are useful for

later school life was one of the goals identified by participants in this study. They seemed to subscribe to the constructivistic view, which suggested that children gather information about how the world works by engaging in the surrounding environment.

Creating an environment that ensures that children become competent readers and writers is a central concern for the initial years of education in Britain. As Peter Hannon (1995) explained, 'Educationally, literacy is the key to the rest of the curriculum. Virtually all schooling after the first year or two assumes pupil literacy. Many schools are anxious to establish this pattern of pupil learning from the earliest possible stage, which means establishing a pattern of children's learning as soon as possible after school entry.' (pp.5/6)

At the same time, knowing about reading, planning reading in the curriculum, and managing a class in such a way as to give children time to read, are often difficult problems, especially at the start of a teaching career. Making a decision becomes even more difficult since there is a lot of confusing and perhaps conflicting advice coming from statutory requirements, researchers, teachers, parents and the media, regarding how children can be successfully taught how to read.

Despite that fact, the amount and variety of information regarding the teaching of reading indicates that reading is not a simple activity and consequently

knowledgeable practitioners are required who are willing to take a flexible approach to teaching.

This thesis, while discussing reading, supports the notion presented by Bowman et al. (2001) who argued for caring for all areas of a child's development 'through activities which work with children's emergent understandings and provide the concepts, knowledge, and opportunities to extend those understandings. When these activities operate in the child's zone of proximal development where learning is within reach but takes the child just beyond his or her existing ability then these activities are expected to be both enjoyable and educational.' (p.10)

Furthermore, Unsworth (2001) considered another parameter when he argued that 'literacy development is a fundamentally social process. The kinds of readers and writers children will become will be crucially influenced by the kinds of texts they are given access to and the kinds of interactions around those texts that they experience... Negotiating this social construction of literacies amongst schools, their communities, and government educational authorities, *involves teachers in a complex range of activities both within the classroom and interacting with community and institutional expectations.*' (p.183) [my emphasis]

The above quotation from Len Unsworth's book puts this study into perspective, especially since he went on to emphasise that 'in the early years of schooling the intensity of this negotiation is quite palpable to the parents and teachers of young

children and to the children themselves as they gradually learn what counts as literacy practices in various social contexts. Schools may appear to have a common view that they want children to read and write, but to be engaged readers and writers, entails both enjoyment and critically productive individual and social activity. However, it is in the process of 'doing' literacy that children learn what counts as literacy.' (Unsworth, 2001 (p.183))

Experience and research (e.g. Riley, 1996; Campbell, 2004; Miller and Paige-Smith, 2004) has shown that teachers who create an environment where learning can occur easily are more successful than those who use particular methods or materials. Teachers who are clear about their aims and intentions, who plan so as to cover aspects of reading through purposeful activities, will help the children enjoy and learn how to read.

Moreover, the researcher comes from a culture that emphasises a broad-based conception of literacy. Thus the real question is finding ways to present literacy that will make children integrate different aspects of their experiences. It is hoped that through this thesis it will be demonstrated that early years practitioners are aware of ways of helping children to make links between different areas of learning. As Wood and Attfield (1996) pointed out, 'teachers need to know what these links are, how they occur spontaneously as part of children's everyday common sense and learning, how they can be planned intentionally, and how they can be presented in ways which are compatible with children's understanding'. (p.83) In this line of argument

it is important that the education of teachers and other early years practitioners helps them to acquire the ability to reflect on their beliefs and to develop the meta-cognitive capabilities that will help them tailor their teaching strategies and approaches to the needs of the students.

This thesis discusses how teaching reading in early years is theorised and how it can be practised. It highlights the roles early years teachers have chosen for themselves regarding reading, their attitudes towards teaching young children, the differing emphasis they place on care and education, and finally the ways they understand their work. The results of this study indicate consistency between the beliefs and practices of early years teachers and other practitioners, which is reflected through the kind of activities they present to the children. Participants in this study seemed to also support the sociocultural approach, which proposes that children ‘construct ideas and ways of thinking primarily through social interactions with more knowledgeable peers and adults’. (Bowman et al., 2001 (p.266))

Reading can be a useful and satisfying activity. The aim behind this thesis is to use the teaching experiences of early years practitioners as a means of entering the debate on the teaching of reading. The intention is to find out what practitioners themselves suggest as effective ways of teaching reading, in a period where teachers are asked to adopt practices that have not yet been established.

1:1 The organisation of the thesis

This thesis is divided into six sections.

The Introduction has explained how the researcher's background led her to this study. The aim was to set the context for this study and explain the rationale behind, and the importance of, the research questions.

Chapter 2 will consider the literature that informs and gives rise to the research questions. The review is of necessity wide-ranging because very little is written about early years teachers' beliefs. As a result, part of the review draws upon the literature on primary teachers' planning, decision-making, pedagogical thoughts, judgements, and professional development.

This chapter will be divided into two parts. The first will discuss: a) the nature and characteristics of beliefs, and b) how teachers' beliefs influence their teaching.

The second part of the chapter will discuss: a) teachers' beliefs as part of their subject-matter knowledge, b) the concepts, understandings and skills children need to acquire in order to learn to read successfully as derived from the literature, and it will conclude with c) teachers' beliefs on the teaching of reading. As a result, a theoretical framework about teachers' beliefs within the context of teaching reading will be presented.

Chapter 3 will provide the justification for the qualitative approach, which was used for the collection of the data in this research. The methods of data collection will be described and the rationale behind the methodology of the study will be explained. The second part of this chapter will describe and evaluate what the researcher actually did in terms of analysing the data and in particular it will describe how validity and reliability issues were dealt with.

Chapter 4 will present the findings of data collected by questionnaires, interviews and observations. Dominant conceptualisations and ideologies of early years teaching will be examined. Through the use of a variety of research strategies, the researcher will present information concerning both the nature and the quality of provision in early years education. This will be achieved by exploring significant parameters of quality, such as the settings in which provision was made, the level of resourcing, and the qualifications of the professionals who work with young children. This research is set out to elicit practitioners' views on what might constitute quality of provision for early learning in the context of teaching reading.

Chapter 5 will provide a discussion of the findings and will present the information gathered regarding early years practitioners' beliefs about issues raised from the quantitative data as well as from the qualitative analysis of practitioners' views. This chapter will discuss practitioners' views about factors that support or constrain the implementation of a quality curriculum in the early years. In the context of teaching reading, teachers' aims will be identified, relationships between aims will be

acknowledged, and practitioners' understandings of their roles within the current educational context will be explored.

An additional aim of this chapter is to present how the expressed beliefs of the early years practitioners are put into practice in terms of their teaching of reading. Furthermore, through what the empirical data resulted in, the extent to which there is a link between participants' beliefs and practices will be demonstrated. Recommendations and implications for further research will form the final section of this chapter.

This study hopes to contribute towards the debate about improving the quality of children's early learning. It shares the commitment that a major parameter which influences the quality of provision is the expertise of the early years practitioners, and focuses on how they view their role in terms of teaching reading. As a result, this study will conclude in Chapter 6 by drawing together the issues that have emerged throughout the research in order to argue that early years teachers perceive their work in a particular way. Although there are common experiences in teaching reading to young children, there are different philosophies that influence practitioners' work. Every participant in this study understood and experienced his/her work in a unique way influenced by contextual, social and political factors.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

2:1 Section 1

Though teachers' beliefs can be examined through various perspectives, this literature review chapter will be divided into three sections and address, a) how teachers' beliefs influence their teaching, b) how these coincide with, or differ from, the theoretical models as derived from the literature, and c) whether beliefs are critical to teacher development and changes in their role conception and practices.

The theoretical framework for this study is drawn from the literature on teacher decision-making and more generally on teachers' thought processes (for reviews see Clark and Peterson, 1986; Shavelson and Stern, 1981). This literature encompasses several areas: teacher theories and beliefs, teacher planning prior to instruction, teachers' decision-making prior to instruction, and evaluation after instruction.

The topic of this study falls under the area of teachers' beliefs and specifically refers to teachers' beliefs about the teaching of reading in early years settings. The investigation of teachers' beliefs about reading, or about any area of study, is a complex endeavour. One major obstacle is the lack of conventional agreement among researchers on the definition of teachers' beliefs.

As a result a plethora of terminologies has emerged to describe teachers' beliefs, among them 'attitudes, values, judgements, axioms, opinions, ideology, perceptions, conceptions, conceptual systems, preconceptions, dispositions, implicit theories, internal mental processes, action strategies, rules of practice, practical principles, perspectives, repertoires of understanding, and social strategy'. (Pajares, 1992 (p.309))

The large number of terms highlights the attempts by researchers 'to make explicit and visible the frames of reference through which individual teachers perceive and process information'. (Clark and Peterson, 1986) (cited in Deadman, 1998 (p.13))

Various educational studies on teachers' beliefs have contributed towards defining the meaning of beliefs within the educational context. It is hoped that by looking at beliefs from different fields of study, teachers' beliefs will be re-examined not only from the context of education but also within the framework of cognitive psychology.

Pajares (1992) argued that teachers' attitudes towards education have generally been referred to as teachers' beliefs. On the other hand, Rokeach (1968) argued that attitudes are general positive or negative feelings towards something. Attitudes are different from beliefs, and may be formed on the basis of beliefs. However, both beliefs and attitudes relate to behaviour. The result in both cases is a view that

speaks of an individual's judgement of the truth or falsity of a proposition. This can only be inferred from a collective understanding of what human beings say or do.

Correspondingly, Rokeach (1968) defined a belief as 'a simple proposition, conscious or unconscious, inferred from what a person says or does, capable of being preceded by the phrase – I believe that...'. (p.113)

At the same time, according to Fishbein and Ajzen (1975), 'beliefs refer to a person's subjective probability judgements concerning some discriminable aspect of his world; they deal with a person's understanding of himself and his environment. Specifically we have defined belief as the subjective probability of a relation between the object of belief and some other object, value, concept or attribute.' (p.131)

In his work on the Nature of Human Values, Rokeach (1973), offered five assumptions on the nature of human values: 'a) the total number of values that a person possesses is relatively small, b) everybody everywhere possesses the same values to different degrees, c) values are organised into value systems, d) the antecedents of human values can be traced to culture society and its institutions and personality, and e) the consequences of human values will be manifested in virtually all phenomena that a social scientist might consider worth investigating and understanding'. (p.3) Rokeach's (1973) assumptions on human values are regarded by the researcher as a set of reasons for arguing the importance of the value concept.

His assumptions are related to this study since Rokeach (1973) argued that 'value is a prescriptive or proscriptive belief wherein by some means or end, action is judged to be desirable or undesirable'. (p.7) A value is 'a belief upon which a man acts by preference'. (Allport et al., 1960) (cited in Rokeach, 1973 (p.7))

Moreover, Koballa and Crawley (1985) (cited in Riggs and Enochs, 1990), defined beliefs as 'information that a person accepts to be true'. (p.625) Goodenough (1963) also described beliefs as 'predispositions that are held as true', and continued to argue that beliefs are 'accepted as guides for assessing the future, are cited in support of decisions or are referred to in passing judgement on the behaviour of others'. (p.151)

Others have defined teachers' beliefs as one of the categories of teachers' thought processes that include teachers' knowledge, planning practice and decision-making (Clark and Peterson, 1986). Harste and Burke (1977) have also defined teachers' beliefs as teachers' decisions, while Duffy and Ball (1986) defined beliefs in terms of cognition and conceptual frameworks.

Due to the fact that a mutually agreed definition of the term has not yet been achieved, the first section of this chapter will discuss the nature of beliefs and will describe their characteristics.

2:2 The nature of beliefs

Rokeach (1973) suggested that 'to say that a person has a value is to say that s/he has an enduring prescriptive or proscriptive belief that a specific mode of behaviour or end state of existence is preferred to an opposite mode of behaviour or end state. This belief transcends attitudes towards objects and towards situations. It is a standard that guides and determines action, attitudes towards objects and situations, ideology, presentation of self to others, evaluations, judgements, justifications, comparisons of self with others, and attempts to influence others.' (p.25)

In this section, the properties of beliefs/belief systems will be addressed mainly through works in the field of cognitive psychology by Rokeach (1968), Green (1971), Fishbein and Ajzen (1975) and Abelson (1979) whose formulation and description of the concept offered insightful information.

Day et al. (1998) argued that while the work of an individual teacher will be conditioned by attitudes, beliefs and ideas that are brought to bear upon it, so the work of a school as a whole will be conditioned by the ways that individual value systems relate and interact with each other. Each participant in organisational life can be considered as having a personal value system consisting of:

- values: specified and prized opinions;
- more or less settled models of thinking;

- assumptions: taken for granted ideas or opinions;
- ideals: high personal concepts and visions;
- beliefs: ideas accepted as truths, and
- prejudices: preconceived opinions.

Thompson (1992) argued that despite the current popularity of teachers' beliefs as a topic of study, the concept of beliefs has not been greatly considered in the literature. For the most part this was because the researchers assumed that readers knew what beliefs are.

Attempts have been made to examine the content of beliefs or the way in which beliefs are organised (see Green, 1971; Abelson, 1979; Nespor, 1987; Isenberg, 1990; Thompson, 1992; Pajares, 1992; and Fang, 1996). This study aims at conceptualising beliefs and eventually at describing teachers' beliefs.

Milton Rokeach (1968) suggested that 'because of the large number of beliefs held, they are held in some sort of architectural systems having describable and measurable structural properties, which in turn have observable behavioural consequences'. (p.1)

He continued and described a belief system as 'having represented within it, in some organised psychological, but not necessarily logical form, each and every one of a person's countless beliefs about physical and social reality'. (p.2) Rokeach (1973)

went on to suggest that a value system is 'an enduring organisation of beliefs concerning preferable modes of conduct or end states of existence along a continuum of relative importance'. (p.5)

In addition, Green (1971), who introduced the metaphor of a belief system in an attempt to examine how an individual's beliefs are organised, identified three dimensions of a belief system having to do not with the content but with the means in which they are related to one another.

The first of the three dimensions suggested by Green (1971) relates to the observation that beliefs are not held in isolation from each other and some are related to one another like reasons are connected to conclusions. Rokeach (1968) moved on and defined belief importance in terms of 'connectedness'. 'The more a given belief is functionally connected or in communication with other beliefs, the more implications and consequences it has for other beliefs and therefore the more central the belief.' (p.5) In his attempt to further clarify Green's (1971) dimension of a quasi-logical structure, Rokeach offered four defining assumptions or criteria of 'connectedness'.

- Existential versus non-existential beliefs: beliefs that are directly connected with one's own existence and identity in the physical and social world are assumed to have more connections and consequences for other beliefs than those which are not directly concerned with one's existence and identity.

- Shared versus unshared beliefs: beliefs about existence and self identity may be shared or not by others. The shared ones are assumed to have more functional connections and consequences for other beliefs compared to the non shared ones.
- Derived versus underived beliefs: many beliefs are learned not by direct encounter with the object of belief. These are derived beliefs. The term belief object includes, among other things, persons and culture. In the process of formulating beliefs the belief object is often ascribed with various attributes. Derived beliefs are assumed to have less functional connections and consequences for other beliefs compared to the beliefs from which they are derived.
- Finally *beliefs* concerning and not concerning matters of taste: many beliefs represent arbitrary matters of taste and they are often so perceived by the individuals holding them. Such beliefs are assumed to have fewer connections and consequences for other beliefs.

(Adapted from Rokeach, 1968 (pp.5/6))

The second of Green's (1971) dimensions is related to the **degree of conviction** with which beliefs are held, in other words, their psychological strength. Beliefs can be viewed as central or peripheral. Rokeach (1968) further developed the notion of centrality in a belief system, when he suggested that beliefs are held by the individual in order of importance. Not all beliefs are equally important to an individual. The more important or central a belief is to an individual the more

resistant it is to change. Another feature of this idea is that the more central a belief is, the more connected it is to the other beliefs held. Consequently, if change occurs to a belief close to the central dimension, the impact to the individual and other beliefs held is more widespread. Peripheral beliefs are more easily subjected to examination or change.

The third and final of Green's (1971) dimensions has to do with the claim that 'beliefs are held in clusters, more or less in isolation from other clusters and protected from any relationship with other sets of beliefs'. (cited in Thompson, 1992 (p.130))

For Rokeach (1968) this characteristic represented the notion of congruence. He defined belief congruence in terms of importance and similarity. He asserted that an individual tends to appreciate more other beliefs that are similar to beliefs held by the individual.

On this understanding, other beliefs outside existing beliefs are appreciated more and are important to the individual if they are found to have a degree of congruence with beliefs presently held by the individual. In this way new beliefs are incorporated if they are judged as being compatible with the framework of existing beliefs. This clustering helps to explain inconsistencies in beliefs and the possibility of holding conflicting sets of beliefs.

Abelson (1979) also offered a set of characteristics of beliefs, with regards this time to content, in his attempt to discuss the difference between knowledge and beliefs. He accepted that the set of seven characteristics that he suggested, even though they were defining features, provided an overall sense of a belief system.

1) The elements of a belief system (concepts, propositions and rules) are *not consensual*. Not everybody agrees with the belief and there is an acceptance of alternative beliefs around the same issue. 'Beliefs are held independent of beliefs conceived and held by others. In this way beliefs are distinctive in that they vary at the conceptual level and in highly complex ways.' (Abelson, 1979 (p.356)) Another aspect of non-consensuality is that of existence or non-existence of conceptual entities such as beliefs in God and in extrasensory perception. 'These beliefs are immutable entities that exist beyond individual control or knowledge.' (Pajares, 1992 (p.309))

2) Belief systems often include a *notion of 'existence'* that something exists. To insist that some entity exists implies an awareness of others who believe it does not exist. In the case of a teacher, this could take the form of a belief that certain characteristics existed in the students' behaviour. Then these characteristics tend to be applied to all the students.

The concept of the existential presumption was explained further in a study conducted by Nespor (1987) on trained teachers teaching in the eighth grade. Two

mathematics teachers, participants in his study, expressed strong beliefs about learner entities. One, who believed that learning mathematics is a result of practice, gave students more mathematical tasks to do in individualised settings. In order to motivate the students, the teacher demonstrated the practical uses of mathematics. The teacher believed that students who were lazy did not do well in the subject. The second teacher, who believed that learning mathematics was part of a maturation process, followed her beliefs. She placed students in groups where the activities offered were in accordance to their maturity levels. The teacher thought that learners could not be 'forced' to levels of maturity through practice, and working groups would help in the maturation process.

3) Belief systems often include *representations of alternative worlds*, which are utopian in outlook (Abelson, 1979 (p.357)). This has to do with how the world is and how the world should be. It is a kind of problem solving at an abstract level. In order to create a perfect world, which conforms to a personalised utopian ideology, old rules are discarded or manipulated in order to be replaced by new ones, which conform to the newly created 'idealised' world. In the case of a classroom teacher, this should take the form of idealised goals (what a teacher would like to do), that are different from present realities and not necessarily something with which the teacher in reality is familiar (what is actually the situation in a class). However, once goals are determined to be desirable, this conviction could sustain the hope necessary to preserve the struggle to attain it.

In the study conducted by Nespor (1987), one English language teacher modelled her lessons based on what she would like to have happened when she was a child at school. She attempted to create a stress-free, fun learning environment. In order to achieve that she allowed the students to dictate the pace of her lessons. As a result, the lessons were never completed and the lesson objectives never met. In this case the utopian state was not compatible with the reality of the teaching situation. However, this does not necessarily devalue the teacher's belief in the significance of the utopian state.

4) Belief systems rely on affective components and are highly evaluative. Statements are considered to be good or bad. For Rokeach (1968), an element of assessment is evident (p.113) in belief systems. There are two aspects to this. The cognitive (knowledge of the domain/subject), and the motivational (how an individual is inclined to use an acquired knowledge). These polarities exert a strong organising influence within the system (Abelson, 1979 (p.358)) and as a result have an impact on thoughts and behaviour in important ways. On this basis teachers' feelings about subject matter affect the energy and enthusiasm that they bring to aspects of their task.

The study conducted by Nespor (1987) also clarified this point. The history teachers who valued their subject matter in different ways reflected their differences in their teaching goals. Thus the history teachers who felt that learning history is more than the acquisition of factual knowledge, preferred to use the subject matter in teaching

learners lifelong skills such as how to behave in the classroom and how to organise writing tasks.

5) Belief systems contain a high degree of episodic (anecdotal) material. Pivotal to the formation of beliefs are striking personal experiences, episodes or events that are stored in memory as critical episodes. These critical images are a source of reference to reaffirm a believer's stance about the existence of a belief. The episode can come either from personal experience or from cultural belief systems, folklore or propaganda.

Findings of the Nespor (1987) study further explain this point. A number of the participants suggested that they used past experiences or critical episodes as reference for their present classroom practices. The English teacher who allowed the students to dictate the pace of the lesson 'referred' to her negative memories as a child learning in school in order to create the lesson that she would have liked to have experienced as a child.

6) Belief systems have differing degrees of strength. Beliefs, according to Fishbein and Ajzen (1975), represent 'the information one has about an object. Specifically, a belief links an object to some attribute. With respect to any object-attribute association, people may differ in the strength of their belief. In other words, they may differ in terms of the perceived likelihood that the object has (or is associated with) the attribute in question.' (p.12)

7) Belief systems have unclear boundaries and there is a high degree of overlap with beliefs in other areas. Beliefs 'have no clear rules for determining the relevance of beliefs to real events and situations'. (Nespor, 1987 (p.321)) Therefore beliefs are formulated in relation to their significance and relevance to the believer but not to others. This means that it is unclear where to draw a boundary about belief systems, excluding as irrelevant concepts those beliefs that lie outside the boundaries. This allows belief systems to be extended in unpredictable ways to address very different phenomena. Abelson (1979) used the term of non-consensuality to describe the 'independent nature of belief systems where the elements of one system might be quite different from those of a second in the same domain'. (p.356)

Pajares (1992) argued that definitions represent conventions, general agreements amongst researchers that a particular term will represent a specific concept. Defining beliefs in terms of content as well as in the way they interrelate with each other involves an attempt to conceptualise belief systems and 'understand' that beliefs interrelate with each other. It also helps to understand cognitive structures and form beliefs about all constructs including the nature of knowledge.

Abelson (1979) emphasised that the characteristics of beliefs presented above are 'distinctive features because beliefs have much in common with knowledge systems, and were there no distinctive features at all, then modelling beliefs systems would be like modelling knowledge systems'. (p.356)

Statements like the one above indicate that beliefs have cognitive, affective and behavioural components as well as that the line between beliefs and knowledge is very thin and this possibly explains why knowledge and beliefs are often spoken of interchangeably in everyday practice. Despite this, it can be argued that there are still distinctions between beliefs and knowledge. These distinctions will be addressed in the next section of this chapter.

2:3 Knowledge and beliefs: an attempt to differentiate

Grossman, Wilson and Shulman (1989) argued that a discussion of teachers' knowledge cannot be completed without an accompanying discussion of teachers' beliefs. This is for two reasons. 'First it is difficult to differentiate between the two, and second it is frequently the case that teachers treat their beliefs as knowledge.' (p.31)

At the same time, Abelson (1979) suggested that belief systems and knowledge systems are distinguishable from each other by features which are unique to each system as much as features which are common to both systems.

Rokeach (1968) defined beliefs from the viewpoint of an observer. Beliefs that may be conscious or unconscious may be inferred from what a person does or says. Rokeach argued that beliefs have a cognitive component representing knowledge, an affective component capable of arousing emotion and a behavioural component

activated when action is required. Rokeach (1968) perceived knowledge as a component of beliefs. When clusters of beliefs are organised around an object or a situation and predisposed to action, then this holistic organisation becomes an attitude. Beliefs may also become values, which form the basis of the evaluative, comparative and judgemental function and replace predisposition with an imperative to action. Beliefs, attitudes and values form an individual's belief system.

Nespor (1987), drawing from Anderson's (1979) work, identified four characteristics of beliefs: existential presumption, alternativity, affective and evaluative loading, and episodic structure. Existential presumptions are incontrovertible personal truths that everyone holds. A statement such as 'I believe the sun rises in the east' typifies, according to Rokeach (1968) (p.113), an existential belief. They exist beyond our control or knowledge. In his article Nespor (1987) showed how individuals, due to traumatic experiences, could try to create ideal alternative situations that may differ from reality.

He suggested that beliefs have stronger affective and evaluative components than knowledge and that this effect typically operates independently of the cognition associated with knowledge. Knowledge of a domain differs from feelings about it, a distinction similar to that between knowledge of self and feelings of self-worth. Teachers often teach a course according to the values held in the content itself. Nespor (1987) further added that the knowledge system information is semantically stored whereas beliefs reside in episodic memory with material drawn from

experience or cultural transmission. Beliefs draw their power from previous events that have coloured the comprehension of subsequent events. In addition, belief systems, unlike knowledge systems, do not require a general consensus regarding the validity and appropriateness of the beliefs. This implies that belief systems are by nature disputable and less dynamic than knowledge systems.

Knowledge systems are open to evaluation and critical examination. Belief systems are generally not. With regards to belief systems, their relevance to reality often defies logic, whereas knowledge systems are receptive to reason. And yet Nespor (1987) concluded that beliefs, despite their idiosyncrasies, are far more influential than knowledge in determining how individuals organise their task. On that basis it can be concluded that they are stronger predictors of behaviour.

In the same line of argument, the National Institute of Education produced a report in 1975, which acknowledged the relationship between beliefs and practice. It was stated that: 'It is obvious that what teachers do is directed in no small measure by what they think. Moreover it will be necessary for any innovations in the context, practices and terminology of teaching, to be mediated through the minds and the motives of teachers... If teaching is done... by human teachers the question of the relationship between thought and action becomes crucial.' (p.1) (cited in Cummins, 1998 (p.26)) Shulman (1987) also argued for the need for teachers to make explicit what they did and the reasons for doing so to researchers, other students and the wider community. He proposed that researchers should work with practitioners 'to

develop codified representations of the practical and pedagogical wisdom of able teachers'. (p.11) Thus a key aim of both strands of teacher-knowledge research is to conceptualise adequately the often implicit beliefs, values and knowledge of teachers. The next section of this chapter will comment on subject matter as part of teachers' knowledge base.

2:4 The issue of subject matter

If subject knowledge can be defined as 'the teacher's knowledge of what she or he is teaching that is crucial' (McIntire, 2000 (p.5)), and teaching involves helping others to learn, then understanding the subject content to be taught is a fundamental requirement for teaching. Subject matter provides an essential category of knowledge, which can be separated into distinct components of examination. These are, according to Schwab (1978) (cited in Grossman et al., 1989): content knowledge which refers to the factual information, organising principles and central concepts of a discipline; the substantive structures of a discipline which include the exploratory frameworks or paradigms which are used both to guide the inquiry in the field and to make sense of data; and the syntactic structures of a discipline which includes the knowledge of the ways in which new knowledge is brought into the field. Teachers, according to Wilson et al. (1987), must find ways to communicate knowledge to others. 'They must have two types of subject matter knowledge: knowledge of the subject field, both *writ large* and its particulars, and knowledge of how to help their students come to understand the field. Consequently subject matter and pedagogy

are treated as separate domains. But are subject matter and pedagogy independent? Is it enough that a teacher has knowledge of a content area and knowledge of pedagogical principles? Is pedagogy a set of generic principles that can be applied to any discipline? Is there a subject-specific aspect of pedagogy?' (p.105)

Grossman et al. (1989) acknowledged the importance of subject matter and the role it plays in teaching when they suggested that 'there may be fundamental differences between the subject matter knowledge necessary for teaching and the subject matter knowledge per se'. The difference was first noted by Dewey (1983) when he claimed that 'every study or subject thus has two aspects: one for the scientist as a scientist, the other for the teacher as a teacher. These two aspects are in no sense opposed or conflicting. But neither are they immediately identical.' (pp.285-286) (cited in Grossman et al., 1989 (p.24))

A number of ways of how to teach the structure, key concepts and ways of defining and analysing a subject, as well as the standards of judgement that operate in a curriculum subject, have been shaped by Shulman's (1987) analysis of teacher knowledge. He presented seven knowledge bases that identify the teacher understanding needed to promote comprehension among students. In teaching, the term knowledge base is 'the body of knowledge, skills and dispositions that a teacher needs to perform effectively in a given teaching situation'. (Wilson et al., 1987 (p.106)) Teachers have to make decisions during the pre-active (planning) and interactive (implementation) stages of their teaching (Calderhead, 1984).

Approaching teachers' thinking will help to understand the role of knowledge in planning and instruction. In reviewing this body of literature, Clark and Peterson (1986) explained: 'First research shows that thinking plays an important part in teaching. Teachers do plan in a rich variety of ways, and these plans have real consequences in the classroom. Teachers do have thoughts and make decisions frequently during interactive teaching. Teachers do have theories and belief systems that influence their perceptions, plans and actions. This literature has given the opportunity to broaden our appreciation for what teaching is, by adding rich descriptions of mental activities of teachers to the existing body of work that describes the visible behaviour of teachers.' (p.292)

Wilson et al. (1987) also argued that since research on teachers' thinking has focused primarily on generic cognitive processes that transcend the particularities of subject matter, this body of research tells little about the role played by subject matter in understanding teachers' thoughts. While it can be inferred from studies on teachers' thinking that teachers have knowledge of their curriculum and of the learning process that is used to make decisions, it remains unclear what teachers know about their subject matter and how they choose to represent it during instruction.

In their review of literature on teachers' thoughts, judgements and decision-making, Shavelson and Stern (1981) argued that 'very little attention has been paid to how knowledge of subject matter is integrated into teachers' instructional planning and

the conduct of teaching. Nevertheless, the structure of the subject matter and the manner in which it is taught is extremely important to what students learn and their attitudes toward learning and the subject matter.’ (p.491)

Shulman (1986) called this gap in the literature, the missing paradigm in research on teaching and he claimed that ‘in their necessary simplification of the complexities of classroom teaching, investigators ignored one central aspect of classroom life – the subject matter. Occasionally the subject matter entered into the research as a context variable. But no one asked how subject matter was transformed from the knowledge of teacher into the content of instruction.’ (p.8) In an attempt to explain this, Clandinin et al. (1987) emphasised personal practical knowledge, which Connelly and Deines (1982) (pp.183-184) have defined as ‘a comprehensive view that teachers have of themselves, their situations and their role within a situation. It is composed of theoretical knowledge elements, elements of understanding of the teacher’s practical curriculum situation, and of personal beliefs and values concerning what can and should be done in the teacher’s circumstances.’ (cited in Jonston, 1990 (p.463))

Clandinin (1986) used the construct of image to examine instructional decisions made by teachers at classroom level. Images are a component of personal practical knowledge defined by Clandinin (1986) (p.166) as ‘a personal meta-level organising concept in personal practical knowledge, in that it embodies a person’s experience,

finds expression in practice and is the perspective from which new experience is taken'. (cited in Jonston, 1990 (p.463))

Given that images are a component of personal practical knowledge and therefore are a 'mode of knowing' about teaching, Connelly and Clandinin (1985) (p.182) argued that 'modes of knowing become subsumed into our awareness to be used in carrying out our intentions. Images emerge gradually in a teacher's language as the ideas that they encapsulate and appear as persistent threads or themes over a period of time. These images represent ideas to which teachers continually return. As with Yinger's (1987) (p.295) language of practice, images include a logic or grammar for thought and action, a system of meaning and guidelines for effective practice.' (cited in Jonston, 1990 (p.469)) If the argument made by Jonston (1990) is accepted, then knowledge can be considered as a system of representations and relationships and the ability to represent the subject matter is an important aspect of an individual's subject matter knowledge.

Successful teachers, according to Wilson et al. (1987), cannot simply have an intuitive or personal understanding of a particular concept, principle or theory. Rather, in order to foster understanding, 'they must themselves understand ways of representing the concept for students. They must have knowledge of the ways of transforming the content for the purposes of teaching. In Dewey's terms they must "psychologize" the subject matter. In order to achieve this, teachers must have knowledge of the subject matter that includes a personal understanding of the

content as well as knowledge of ways to communicate that understanding in the minds of students.’ (p.110)

Teachers draw upon many types of knowledge as they are making decisions about the content of their courses. These include:

- Content knowledge (the amount and organisation of knowledge about a subject in the mind of a teacher);
- General pedagogical knowledge (knowledge of the broad principles and strategies of classroom management transcending any one subject area);
- Curriculum knowledge (knowledge of the materials and programmes which support and guide the teaching of a subject);
- Knowledge of learners and their characteristics (knowledge and expectations of typical and of particular learners);
- Knowledge of educational contexts (knowledge of particular classrooms, schools, communities and cultures within which education occurs);
- Knowledge of educational ends (knowledge of agreed purposes and values underpinning educational endeavour). (Wray et al., 1998 (p.10))

Shulman (1986) also regarded teachers as experts who acquire a unique type of knowledge, which he termed as pedagogical content knowledge, and includes the ‘aspects of content most germane to its teachability. Within the category of pedagogical content knowledge [Shulman] includes the most regularly taught topics in one’s subject area, the most useful forms of representations of those ideas, the

most powerful analogies, illustrations, examples, explanations and demonstrations – in a word, the ways of representing and formulating the subject that make it comprehensible to others. Pedagogical content knowledge also includes an understanding of what makes the learning of specific topics easy or difficult – the conceptions and preconceptions that students of different ages and backgrounds bring with them to the learning.’ (p.9)

The work of Shulman and his associates was influential in conceptualising subject knowledge and its pedagogical application. Emphasis was placed on the ways by which teachers selected and represented aspects of a discipline to students and how they developed subject specific pedagogical knowledge. It was assumed that in order to develop pedagogical content knowledge teachers already had a strong understanding of the content and accepted modes of enquiry within a discipline.

But Edwards and Ogden (1997) argued that ‘by placing in that analysis what he terms as pedagogical content knowledge, i.e. that special amalgam of content and pedagogy as a component of professional knowledge alongside, for example, knowledge of subject and of pedagogy, he created a conceptual problem. In listing pedagogical content knowledge with the other categories of teacher knowledge he produced, Shulman appeared to categorise it as an external body of information at the same time as mystifying it to the status of tacit knowledge by describing it as uniquely the province of teachers, their own special form of professional understanding.’ (p.736)

At the same time, the fact that the work of Shulman had been conducted with secondary school teachers raised questions about the applicability of the model in primary or early years education. These concerns were acknowledged by Shulman (1987) when he argued that 'even though much of the emphasis to be found on the centrality of content knowledge in pedagogy holds reasonably well for elementary level as well, I am reluctant to make that claim too boldly'. (p.4) Shulman's associates also exercised caution about the applicability of the model when they argued that 'given the differences between the demands of preparing to teach one subject and preparing to teach five or six subjects, the implications for this research for elementary school teaching should be drawn cautiously'. (Grossman et al., 1989 (p.28))

Despite these limitations a number of research studies (Bennett and Carre, 1993; Aubrey, 1996; Medwell et al., 1998) attempted to identify the extent of primary teachers' subject knowledge and in some cases the relationship between knowledge and classroom practice.

It appears that there is a weak relationship between understanding of subject and pedagogy in Primary School teaching. Aubrey (1996), in her study of teaching mathematics in the Reception Year, found that although the pupils had some knowledge and skills gained before they went to school and took these to the task of learning mathematics, teachers remained influenced by their own feelings, beliefs, disciplinary knowledge and assumptions about the learning and teaching processes

when they set tasks to introduce mathematics to children. Aubrey (1996) observed that teachers' practices were informed by their pedagogical subject knowledge and concluded that subject knowledge is probably an important influence on practice.

The study by Bennett and Carre (1993) also indicated that trainee teachers' subject knowledge across a range of subjects was limited when they were tested at the beginning and end of their training. In addition, the results of the Effective Teachers of Literacy Project (Medwell et al., 1998) also indicated that there was no clear relationship between teachers' explicit academic knowledge and their effectiveness in teaching literacy. 'However, analysis of observed lessons indicated that they were able to present content to pupils and make conceptual connections between different aspects of language and texts. Their knowledge was functional. They knew about and taught the features of language in use but had greater difficulty with language as a system. A model in which teachers' prior knowledge of subject matter and its structure was then transformed into pedagogical content knowledge to make it accessible to pupils, appeared not to be applicable. Knowledge of content seemed to be pedagogically situated.' (Poulson et al., 2001 (pp. 45-46))

A possible counter-argument to these claims came from Shulman (1986) when he argued that his aim was not to 'denigrate the importance of pedagogical understanding or skill in the development of a teacher. Mere content is as likely to be useless pedagogically as content-free skill. But to blend properly, the two aspects

of a teacher's capacity require attention to be paid to the content aspects of teaching as well as to the elements of the teaching process.' (p.8)

But pedagogical content knowledge is not simply a repertoire of multiple representations of subject matter. It is characterised by a way of thinking that facilitates the generation of these transformations, the development of pedagogical reasoning. As Feiman-Nemser and Buchmann (1985) explained 'since teaching is concerned with learning, it also requires thinking about how to build bridges between one's own understanding and that of one's students. Thus pedagogical thinking is strategic, imaginative and grounded in knowledge of self, children and subject matter.' (pp.1-2) (cited in Wilson et al., 1987 (p.115)) Clark and Peterson (1986) also suggested that understanding teachers' beliefs and theories about their work is necessary in order to 'make explicit and visible the frames of reference through which teachers perceive and process information'. (p.287) Working with the beliefs that guide teachers' actions can facilitate the development of pedagogical thinking and the effective application of content knowledge. Grossman et al. (1989) identified two kinds of beliefs held by student teachers about teaching and learning. The first 'is related to the content that they teach. These beliefs appear to influence both what they teach and how they choose to teach it.' The second that appears to be relevant to the subject matter knowledge of teachers is what they have termed as 'an orientation towards the subject matter'. (p.31) These beliefs appear to influence what content was chosen to teach, their goals for instruction and choices of activities. According to Grossman et al. (1989) prospective teachers' beliefs about subject

matter are as influential as their beliefs about teaching and learning. 'Teacher educators must therefore provide opportunities for prospective teachers to identify and examine the beliefs that they have about the content they teach. Additionally it is needed to help teachers acknowledge the influences that those beliefs have on what they learn and what they teach.' (p.32)

Pedagogical content knowledge was seen by Shulman (1987) as a facilitator of pedagogical reasoning. Shulman himself viewed teaching through a model of pedagogical reasoning and action. 'Given a text, educational purposes and/or a set of ideas, pedagogical reasoning and action involve a circle through the activities of comprehension, transformation, instruction, evaluation and reflection. The starting point and terminus for the process is an act of comprehension.' (p.14) The argument underpinning this model (summarised by Bennett et al., 1993) is that the teacher must first comprehend the ideas to be taught and the purposes to be achieved. This must then be transformed into forms that are pedagogically powerful, yet adaptive to pupil understandings. Such transformations require a combination of: a) preparation – critical scrutiny and choice of materials of instruction; b) representation – a consideration of the key ideas and how they might be represented in the form of analogies, examples etc.; c) instructional selections – choice of teaching approach; and d) adaptation – the tailoring of input, whatever its form, to pupils' capabilities and characteristics. Instruction is the teaching act that takes place within a system of classroom management and organisation. The process of evaluation includes checks for pupils' understanding as well as more formal assessment and feedback, a process

which Shulman argued requires all the forms of teacher comprehension and evaluation described above. Reflection requires reconstruction, re-enactment or recapturing of events or accomplishments and is the analytic process through which a professional learns from experience. This leads back to comprehension – a new beginning.

Thus the goal for teacher education is to educate teachers to reason soundly about their teaching. ‘Teachers should demonstrate the capacity to engage in these processes when called upon and teacher education should provide student teachers with understandings and performance abilities that they will need to reason their ways through and to produce a complete act of pedagogy as presented in Shulman’s model.’ (Bennett et al., 1993 (pp.8-9)) But working in early years education indicates working within a multi-disciplinary team. Depending on practitioners’ training and background, different priorities or conflicting points of view might be expressed. Knowing what is involved in the teaching process can facilitate the implementation of the judgements that inform their teaching. The relationship between beliefs and practices will be further discussed in the next section of this chapter.

2:5 The relationship between beliefs and teaching practice

Roust Von Wright (1986) argued that beliefs are understood as part of people’s internal representation of the world. The worldview can be described as a knowledge

construction with models of different occurrences. These models are of importance for our understanding since they are the basis for what we direct our attention towards. Constructing a worldview means organising one's experiences, impressions, feelings and knowledge. The individual worldview develops through constant interaction with the environment through repeating circles of action and feedback. And so beliefs and conceptions concerning the teachers' role are part of one's worldview. Changing beliefs is part of the knowledge process of the individual and previous beliefs can have an impact on their knowledge construction.

To develop an understanding of teachers' classroom practice, and of how it may be changed or improved and of the capacity of teachers themselves to bring about such an improvement, the study of teachers' thinking and decision-making must include the investigation of teachers' beliefs. This must be to the extent that teachers are involved in establishing the teaching context and the ways in which the context limits or constrains their thoughts, decisions and actions.

In order to carry out their professional function and to interact meaningfully with pupils and colleagues, teachers must develop ways of understanding this environment that enables them to make decisions and guide their everyday actions. Teachers' decisions may vary in their nature. Some of them are reflective and require a lot of thinking and evaluation. Others are immediate or routine. The terms preactive and interactive (Calderhead, 1984 (p.4)) are used to distinguish the two contexts of teacher activity that are characterised by different types of decision-

making. Calderhead's research on teachers' thinking, in both the preactive and interactive phases, provided information about the nature, the kind of teaching and the decision-making it involves. The research indicated that in the preactive phase the teacher makes decisions concerning the designing and the sequencing of activities that will appropriately occupy teacher and pupils during class time. In the interactive phase the teacher is engaged in implementing these activities. Calderhead (1984) argued that 'in order to accomplish that, the teacher may have to make several intermediate decisions and rely on a repertoire of teaching routines in order to cope with the emerging demands of the classroom'. (p.11)

Both preactive and interactive phases of teaching occur within a context that can exert a powerful influence on what happens in the classroom. There are factors at work in the context of conventional classroom life that prevent the fluid transfer of public arrangements to private activities. Analysts of classroom ecology (Barker and Gump, 1964; Hatton, 1987; Doyle, 1978) have covered the area (cited in Little and McLaughlin, 1993 (p.25)). The basic argument is that classroom settings can be analysed by identifying the structure of opportunities that they make available, along with the kinds of situational constraints they impose (Huberman, 1983).

Physical constraints, such as the size and the composition of the class and the materials available, or ideological constraints, such as commonly held beliefs, values and expectations about content and methods of teaching, determine what is possible for the teachers to do. Teachers cannot determine the socio-economic background of

the pupils and they are relatively incapable of changing the beliefs and expectations held by head teachers, governors, parents, or perhaps the teachers themselves. Due to the powerful framework of physical and ideological constraints within which teachers work, on occasions their classroom practice may reflect the demands of that context more than teachers' beliefs about good or appropriate teaching. On other occasions teachers may experience greater freedom to determine their practice or negotiate the framework of constraints within which decisions are made.

All this means that planned activity cannot be carried on over an extended period and that the effects of instructional treatments cannot be clearly gauged. Thus the link between instruction and outcome remains insecure. As this link is not ensured by scientific research, there are not enough strong generalisations to override the variations in pupils, teachers and instructional situations. On that basis the 'core of teachers' theories is concerned with principles derived from observations of their own and virtually no one else's experience in the classroom'. (Little and McLaughlin, 1993 (p.26))

In addition, in teaching as a profession, it is assumed that a repertoire of qualities and skills is required. These may be differently applied according to 'the teachers' discretionary judgement as expressed through their "pedagogical tact". These skills and judgements will be self and peer developed and monitored. In teaching as an art, evaluation by self or peers relies upon holistic judgements that recognise the unpredictable and personalised nature of teaching.' (Day, 1999 (p.94))

Rainer (1999) argued that a major influence on our view of teaching is our perception of learning. One of the learning theories that acknowledges the influence of beliefs on teaching is constructivism, 'which assumes that people create knowledge from the interaction between their existing knowledge or beliefs and the new ideas or situations they encounter'. (p.192)

Constructivist theory (Lambert et al., 1995) emphasises the importance of beliefs in the process of communication, as well as in the generation of viable meaning systems for innovative practices. This is because among the theory's principles we find that:

- a) Knowledge and beliefs are formed within the learner.
- b) Learners personally imbue experiences with meaning.
- c) Learning activities cause learners to gain access to their experiences, knowledge and beliefs.
- d) Reflection and metacognition are essential aspects of constructing knowledge.
- e) Learners play a critical role in assessing their own learning.
- f) Learning is a social activity that is enhanced by shared inquiry.

However, constructivism as a theory of learning is very difficult to represent in reality. Richardson (1997) suggested that 'the difficulty in translating a theory of learning into the practice of teaching occurs because teaching takes place in contexts and it is not a direct translation of a psychological process'. (p.3)

Buchmann (1986) argued that the process of education shapes teachers' beliefs about what is appropriate in teaching, and teachers' conceptions about their professional role. Conceptions of their role may in turn shape their teaching practice.

A way of understanding reflective practice is presented by Schön (1983) who emphasised 'reflection in action, which means reflection on knowing in action. As a consequence practitioners do not operate in a real world but in a constructed representation of a practical situation.' (cited in Carlgren, 1990 (p.201)) The question of reflective teaching is connected with the question of the nature of teachers' knowledge, as well as with the relationships between thinking and acting in teachers' work.

A metaphor for teachers' knowledge is the concept of image. According to Clandinin and Connelly (1987) teachers' personal, practical knowledge can be conceptualised in the form of images from which practical principles and rules can be derived. The images are the 'intellectual power' behind the practices. The concept of image is regarded as a way to describe teachers' knowledge and minded practice. 'The construct of image has been used as a conceptual device that enables to give an account of the [*teachers*'] practices and the distinctiveness of the whole person.' (Clandinin, 1986 (p.129)) To describe teaching practice means that thinking and acting are not separated but one is a prerequisite as well as a consequence of the other. How then is it ever possible to change practice in a radical way? How is this connected to the relationship between thinking and acting?

Day et al. (1990) argued that there is a connection between thinking and acting similar to that of means and ends. If this connection is seen as mechanical, then the question of comprehension or incomprehension is not important. The connection does not have to be created; it is sufficient to introduce the means in order to get to the ends. 'Instead of that, the connection might be seen as possible, but in order for that to happen the possibility must be realised. To be realised it must be comprehended. This in turn means that what is comprehended is possible to be accomplished. The quality of the thinking and the relationship between the thinking and the acting will thus determine what is possible to accomplish.' (p.210)

On this understanding, one goal of teaching for Green (1971) was to help teachers form belief systems that consist of a large portion of evidence and reason. Green (1971) suggested that teaching should aim at minimising the number of core beliefs and belief clusters and maximising the relationship amongst the clusters. Brophy and Good (1974) also argued that a better understanding of teachers' belief systems or conceptual base, will significantly contribute to enhancing educational effectiveness. The process through which something like that might happen is, as suggested by Fenstermacher (1979), about helping teachers via teacher education to transform tacit or unexamined beliefs about teaching, learning or the curriculum into objectively reasonable or evidence-based beliefs. In other words the goal is to help teachers identify and assess their beliefs in relation to practice. 'Interpreting the tasks of teaching and schooling demands that teachers examine the consistencies and inconsistencies between and within their "espoused theories" of teaching and

learning and their “theories in action”, and that they set these in the context of an appreciation of the challenges and constraints of the system as a whole.’ (Day, 1999 (p.46))

Setting up and developing collaborative work over time requires ‘sustained interactivity’ (Huberman, 1993) and this requires that teachers engage in discussions in their schools. Talk is the means by which teachers deconstruct, test out and reconstruct their beliefs and espoused theories of education (Argyris and Schön, 1974) (cited in Day, 1999 (p.46)). Most of this co-construction will need to challenge teachers to move beyond exchange to critique. The level of this depends on individual trust and institutional support.

But understanding beliefs, according to Roekach (1968), also requires making inferences about individuals’ underlying states, inferences fraught with difficulty because individuals are often unable or unwilling to accurately present their beliefs. Because of this, researchers have developed a variety of ways for thinking about how teachers’ knowledge and beliefs shape their classroom practices. Teachers’ beliefs – encompassing suppositions, commitments and ideologies – have been situated in a variety of settings and contexts.

Clark (1980) argued that several metaphors for the teacher have been used to describe various aspects of teaching. The teacher has been called a clinical information processor, a decision-maker, a planner, a diagnostician and a problem

solver. This multiplicity of metaphors suggest that there are several different models of teaching underlying the small but growing body of literature on research on teachers' thinking.

Building on the work of Shulman (1987), Grossman (1990) offered a framework for thinking about knowledge that includes: a) general pedagogical knowledge, b) subject matter knowledge, and c) knowledge of context. General pedagogical knowledge describes a body of general knowledge beliefs and skills related to teaching and learning not specific to any particular content or domain. Subject matter knowledge includes not only factual knowledge of the domain but also incorporates beliefs about the purposes of teaching a specific subject area, knowledge of students' understandings of that subject area, curricular knowledge and knowledge of instructional strategies and representations. Contextual knowledge refers to individual teacher's understandings of the school culture and setting in which they teach.

Moreover, Calderhead (1996) identified five categories of teachers' beliefs: a) beliefs about learners and learning, b) beliefs about teaching, c) beliefs about subject areas, d) beliefs about learning to teach, and e) beliefs about self and the role of teachers in learning. Teachers' beliefs about learners and learning often come from assumptions about students' ability while beliefs about teaching usually reflect teachers' overall beliefs about teaching and sustaining positive social relationships with their students.

Understanding teachers' beliefs and theories about their work is necessary as Clark and Peterson (1986) commented, in order to make explicit and visible the frames of reference. Briscoe (1996) claimed that 'if teachers are to reconstruct their beliefs to be consistent with ideal images and innovative practices, they must be in a setting that promotes the reconciliation and the reconstruction processes through which individual teachers perceive and process information'. (p.287) As these frames of reference are tacit, teachers may not be aware of the possible conflict between their underlying beliefs and the philosophical underpinnings of proposed changes to their practices. Yet these frames provide an organisation for their existing knowledge. According to Clark and Peterson (1986) (cited in Clark, 1995), 'the maturing professional teacher is one who has taken some steps towards making explicit his or her own implicit theories and beliefs about learners' curriculum subject matter and teachers' role'. (p.12)

Further, they act as filters when teachers have new experiences, as well as influence the way they view the educational change (Borko and Putman, 1995). The extent to which beliefs actually influence teaching practice will be addressed in the next section of this chapter.

2:6 The impact of beliefs on teaching practice

Alexander (1997) defined good practice as having the following characteristics. Children are appropriately and gainfully occupied while the teacher produces

specific and recognisable kinds of learning, where causal relationships between teaching and learning can be demonstrated. Finally, good teaching is consistent with 'the values and beliefs that teachers hold about the proper purposes and value of education'. (p.279)

Similarly Feiman-Nemser and Floden (1986) cautioned that teacher educators must build or rebuild on what teachers, or teachers to be, already believe about their work. But in what ways should teacher educators attempt to build or rebuild teacher candidates' beliefs? Fenstermacher (1979) argued that 'if our purpose and intent are to change the practices of those who teach, it is necessary to come to grips with the subjectively reasonable beliefs of teachers'. Fenstermacher (1979) also proposed that 'knowledge of the content of beliefs becomes an important first step in the identification of variables within the educational context which mediates between thinking and practice of teachers'. (cited in Brousseau and Freeman, 1988 (p.267))

If teachers' attitudes, beliefs and purposes mediate their behaviour, these factors are worthy objects of study for those who would better understand teaching practice, as well as for those whose aim is to find better ways to help teachers develop. Richardson (1996) commented that 'in such change programmes, beliefs and attitudes of incoming pre-service students and in-service teachers strongly affect what and how they learn and are also targets of change within the process'. (p.102)

Teaching frequently involves solving ill-structured problems, which are characterised by a large amount of information and the absence of a single solution (Voss and Post, 1988). Nespor (1987) argued that the ill-structured nature of many of the problems encountered by teachers resulted in their beliefs playing a major role in defining and selecting strategies because, unlike other forms of knowledge, beliefs can be flexibly applied to new problems. Nespor (1987) suggested that in the course of teacher education, it seemed likely that 'some crucial experience or some particularly influential teacher, produces a rich detailed episodic memory which later serves the student teacher as an inspiration and a template for his or her own practices'. (p.320)

Pajares (1992), in the same line of argument, found that there was 'a strong relationship between teachers' educational beliefs and their planning, instructional decisions and classroom practices' (p.326), and that 'educational beliefs of pre-service teachers play a pivotal role in their acquisition and interpretation of knowledge and subsequent teaching behaviour'. (p.328) It seems that 'beliefs are far more influential than knowledge in determining how individuals organise and define tasks and problems and are stronger predictors of behaviour'. (p.311)

Moreover, Borko and Putnam (1995) suggested that teachers' knowledge and beliefs play an essential role in their practices and shape the learning that goes on inside and outside their classroom.

Furthermore, Olsen (1981) argued that any educational innovation is filtered through teachers as they modify instructional activities to fit their beliefs and the instructional and management routines in their classrooms.

The main opinion presented in the literature is that beliefs exert a powerful influence on the way individuals behave, and there most probably is a reciprocal relationship between beliefs and actions. However the literature has also shown that due to the influence of external factors like school policy, imposed curricula and examinations, inconsistencies between beliefs and actions sometimes occur (Davis, Konopak and Readence, 1993).

2:7 Changing teachers' beliefs

Rokeach (1968) argued that '*beliefs*, attitudes and values are all organised together to form a functionally integrated cognitive system, so that a change in any part of the system will affect other parts and will culminate in behavioural change'. (p.ix) He continued to argue that 'a behavioural change (and this includes an expressed opinion change) may be determined by a change in attitude-toward-object, or attitude-toward-situation, or both, or neither'. (p.147) Correspondingly, when change occurs to a belief or a belief system, it may not be a result of a reasoned argument, nor necessarily based on evidence. It is rather a matter of 'conversion or gestalt shift'. (Nespor, 1987 (p.321)) Beliefs change in ways that are considered important by the believer. Beliefs are 'invisible' until the person behaves in a

manner that reveals his/her beliefs. Thus beliefs may be both resistant to external influence yet sensitive to internal influence.

At the same time, if we accept that the practitioners' own sense of self is deeply embedded in their teaching, it should not be surprising that they find real change difficult to contemplate and accomplish (Rudduck, 1991) (cited in Day, 1999 (p.97)).

There is a growing literature on teachers' belief systems and their impact on learning and teaching practices (e.g. Fang, 1996). This literature revealed, as stated by Westwood, Knight and Redden (1997), that teachers' beliefs are frequently so strongly held that: 'a) they can cause resistance to change in curriculum and methods (Allington and Lie, 1990), b) they can lead to resistance to advice and support from resource staff (Fields, 1995) and c) they can influence the degree to which teachers are willing or not willing to make adaptations in their teaching approach for students with problems in learning'. (Westwood et al., 1995 (p.226))

Little empirical evidence exists in the teacher education literature on the influence of teacher education on teachers' values and beliefs. Consensus exists that teacher education has little effect on altering teachers' beliefs (Weinstein, 1989), and that changes in practice do not necessarily accompany changes in beliefs (Prawat, 1992), as well as that changes in practices and beliefs do not necessarily generalise across the teaching of different subject matters. For example, Lortie (1975) argued that pre-

service teachers' previous experience as pupils, the apprenticeship of observations and schools' organisation and culture have more influence than formal teacher education in shaping their teaching. Smith (2001) argued that 'internationally, since the work of Lortie (1975), evidence has accumulated to indicate that teacher training is a minimal impact enterprise. The lack of impact of training has been generally attributed to the weight of previous experience of education (as a learner) that each student teacher brings with them to their course (e.g. Powel, 1992). This thought leads to a predisposition to teach in particular ways and to entrenched beliefs about the nature of teaching and learning. Some feel that these initial beliefs need to be re-examined and perhaps modified if student teachers are to make progress.' (p.115)

Florio-Ruane and Lensmire (1990) found that positive change depends on attention to teachers' previous beliefs, attitudes and experiences, and that meaningful change in instruction entails fundamental change in what teachers know and believe. The belief system has a powerful effect. Not only does it determine how an individual thinks and feels but it also affects behaviour particularly in relationships. New relationships are very much about testing out interpersonal value systems for similarities and differences. Clashes of values may inhibit the development of a relationship while similarities of values may serve to extend or deepen it. The decision to end or continue an interaction will depend on the comfort or discomfort experienced as the two belief systems interact.

The question of whether teacher education can alter teachers' beliefs is important for empirical research and relevant to teacher education policy.

Specific studies of change have shown that teachers will alter new practices handed down to them so that the proposed changes fit more closely with their existing implicit beliefs (Eisenhart, Cuthbert, Shurm and Harding, 1988). Therefore beliefs and theories must be made explicit in order to change beliefs, change practices and understand why a programme, or reform, may not work as it was intended when implemented in the classroom.

Bliem and Davinroy (1997) argued that by making beliefs evident it may be possible to ease the incorporation of new practices into a teacher's repertoire by highlighting differences between teachers' beliefs and the philosophy of the new practices. 'When differences are identified they can be confronted and debated in a thoughtful way so that teachers choose to retain or alter their beliefs.' (p.3)

One construct that clearly influences practices of teachers involves personal images of teaching and learning (Elbaz, 1983). Clandinin (1987) developed a concept of image together with experience as forming the basis of teachers' personal practical knowledge. Sanders and McCoucheon (1986) (cited in Briscoe, 1996) also noted the important role of images as part of teachers' practical theories. 'Practical theories of teaching are the conceptual structures and visions that provide teachers with reasons for acting as they do and for choosing the teaching activities and curriculum

materials they choose in order to be effective. They are principles or propositions that underpin and guide teachers' appreciation, decisions, and actions.' (p.316)

In contrast with scientific knowledge, practical knowledge is highly contextualised and personal. Johnson (1992) claimed that this knowledge comes from experience in practice, is inherent in intelligent action and builds up from personal and professional expertise. On this understanding, in building practical knowledge, both beliefs and knowledge are closely interwoven, but the nature of beliefs makes them the filter through which new knowledge is interpreted. The filtering effect of beliefs then shapes thinking and learning. Pajares (1992) reported some commonalities on the definition of beliefs: a) they are highly individual, deeply personal and seem to persist, b) they are formed by past experiences, and c) they represent an individual's understanding of reality enough to guide thought and behaviour and to influence learning.

According to Richardson (1996), beliefs are considered to have two functions in learning or expertise development. The first function is related to making sense of new information based on what we know and believe. Thus beliefs strongly influence what teachers learn and the way teachers process information. The second function is related to changing beliefs. Richardson (1996) reported that the findings of belief change studies can be divided into two groups: a) teachers' beliefs about education are difficult if not impossible to change, and b) teachers' beliefs about

education can change depending on the content and nature of influences that one undergoes (i.e. a certain schooling activity or colleagues' ideas).

Posner et al. (1982) argued that research in the area of conceptual change involves a three-part process that promotes transformation of knowledge and schemes: a) experiencing the situation that creates dissatisfaction with existing knowledge schemes, b) believing that information gained from the experience must be reconciled with existing schemes, and c) reducing inconsistencies with existing knowledge by constructing alternative schemes which seem plausible.

Exchange lies at the core of self-generating knowledge (Wallace, 1995). Therefore beliefs and conceptions must be open for debate and exchange. Beliefs become of relevance for action only when they are shared with others. Gunstone and Northfield (1992) (cited in Tillema, 1997) offered a model of learning in which the teacher is empowered to 'recognise', 'evaluate' and 'decide' whether or not to 'reconstruct' knowledge and beliefs. This approach to conceptual change entails four stages.

Stage One: Recognition and attention or explicating one's knowledge and beliefs. If conceptual reconstructing is to be achieved, beliefs have to be made explicit and the teachers' emotional attachment to these beliefs revealed. Old beliefs and new ideas are recognised as such that the teacher is intellectually challenged to open his or her ideas for scrutiny.

Stage Two: Evaluation and investigation or study. The way to decide if new ideas are plausible and intelligent is to experiment, study and investigate. This involves creating opportunities for the teacher to familiarise himself/herself with new information and to try out new ideas in their own way. As a result, teachers will test the tenability of their existing ideas as well as establish a cognitive attachment to the new information.

Stage Three: Decision to change or belief change. This stage is in fact comprised of the actual moment at which new information is perceived to be acceptable. This means it is coherent or reconcilable with the pre-existing belief structure, and as such it is prepared for in the previous stages. Offering new information can bring the teacher up to this point. It is, however, up to the teacher himself/herself to decide to change and allow the reconstruction of his/her knowledge base.

Stage Four: Reconstruction or building up a revised knowledge structure. The decision to change does not resolve the discrepancy between prior beliefs or knowledge and new information. The new information may have stirred up the existing knowledge structure and made it obsolete. Once this state of affairs has been accepted, the new information can be used to loosen the anomalies and search for a fit between the new and the old information. Embedding the new information is the last objective in the process of conceptual reconstructing.

Tobin and Jakubowski (1990) (cited in Briscoe, 1996) suggested that conceptual change involves teachers reconstructing personal images of teaching and learning. When teachers are able to construct ideal images of teaching and learning and through reflection, compare their own teaching with these ideal images, they may make changes in their practices that are consistent with ideal images. Thus images can serve as objects for reflection.

Olson (1980) argued that often teachers' beliefs are not consistent with beliefs implicit in an innovation. In such cases, the teacher may reconstruct the innovation and its associated beliefs and thus make the innovation more familiar or practical to them. On the other hand, if teachers' beliefs conflict with those implicit in the innovation, personal knowledge structures may be reconstructed. Noss and Hoyles (1993) argued that as teachers attempt to incorporate change into existing practices, they face a challenge in their work to clarify a new set of ideas and practices whose interactions with existing practice are not at all evident but emerge in the course of the innovation.

Change at deeper sustained levels involves the modification or transformation of values, attitudes, emotions and perceptions that inform practice and these are unlikely to occur unless there is participation in, and a sense of, ownership of the decision-making change process. Change, which is not internalised, is likely to be cosmetic and temporary. Understanding individual teacher histories and local school and classroom contexts is crucial to the successful change process (Day, 1999

(p.98)). This is because people respond to change both in a logical way and in a way that is underpinned by emotions. Connor (1995) (cited in James and Connolly, 2000) listed the main reasons for resisting change. He argued that it is important to view these resistances as natural responses. They are understandable because at the heart of them all is emotion, especially anxiety. They are as follows:

- Lack of trust. People may resist change because they do not trust the change initiators' interpretation of the need for change.
- Belief that change is unnecessary. If there is no clear evidence that the need for change is high then resistance will also be high.
- Belief that the change is not feasible. Even if the need for change is recognised, resistance to it may be justified on the grounds that the proposed change will not work.
- Economic threats. Change is likely to be resisted if it threatens the job security of those affected by it. This threat could be perceived in a number of ways. Changes in ways of working may make existing skill sets redundant. Changes in structure may make particular posts redundant.
- The relatively high cost. In any attempt to change, the cost benefit equation can be used as a source of resistance.
- Fear of failure. Change requires adaptation to a new way of working and individuals may have anxieties about their capability to adapt.
- Threats to values and ideas. Change that is not consistent with individuals' values and beliefs is perceived as a threat to individuals' integrity and sense of self.

- Resentment of interference. Some people will resist a change if they see it as an attempt to be controlled by others. Members of the institution who have low self-esteem may seek to give themselves confidence and security by remaining firmly in control of their world. (pp.19-20)

Finally the importance of the teacher as an implementor cannot be overemphasised. How s/he perceives the change, its effectiveness, its fit and the importance that gets attached to implementation and continued use determines whether or not something new gets used.

Richardson (1994) argued that there are three current conceptions of the typical pattern of events in the teacher change process. The first, argued by Fullan (1985), suggests that teachers change their beliefs after they change their practice and are able to see that the new practice positively affects the students. Secondly, Richardson et al. (1991) argued that changes in beliefs precede changes in practice. The third, suggested again by Richardson (1994), claims that the process of changing beliefs and practices is interactive, that is, depending on the types of changes and the teachers themselves, the change process may begin either with changes in beliefs or with changes in practice.

Constraints to implementing beliefs have been found in social, psychological and environmental realities, low ability students and state mandated curriculum (Wilson, Konopak and Readence, 1994). In another study in 1994 these same researchers

examined pre-service teachers' beliefs and practices. Inconsistencies between beliefs and practice led them to emphasise the importance of integrating the realities of the classroom with the realities of the theories of instruction during pre-service education.

This section was an attempt to organise the theoretical framework of the research as well as to answer the following question:

Do teachers use a theoretical framework in their approach to teaching?

Having reviewed the literature about teachers' beliefs, it can be argued that the extent to which teachers adopt new instructional practices in their classroom relates closely to the degree of alignment between their personal beliefs and the assumptions underlying innovatory teaching programmes or methods. On this basis, understanding teachers' beliefs is important in understanding teachers' current classroom practices. But examining implicit beliefs is 'blurry at best' (Grossman, Wilson and Shulman, 1989 (p.31)). Harste and Burke (1977) argued that 'if beliefs are implicit they may not be articulated, and as beliefs do not necessarily transfer into practice they cannot be inferred directly from practice. These authors did argue that despite atheoretical statements teachers are theoretical in their instructional approach.' (p.32) (cited in Medwell, Wray, Poulson and Fox, 1998 (p.25))

Section 2

2:8 Explaining the rationale

The first section of the literature review attempted to examine the extent to which there is a relationship between teachers' beliefs and their teaching practices. The literature provided a cogent rationale for the study of teachers' beliefs. This rationale is very synthesised, from statements that since teachers are thinking humans, their actions are influenced by their thoughts and beliefs, to arguments stating that in order to understand teachers' actions, we have to gain an insight into these implicit and often subconscious facets of their work (e.g. National Institute of Education, 1975; Clark and Peterson, 1986; Isenberg, 1990). If teachers are theoretical in their instructional approaches it can be tentatively suggested that beliefs exert a powerful influence on the way individuals behave, and that there may be a clinical reciprocal relationship between beliefs and actions (e.g. Mumby, 1982; Pajares, 1992; Fang, 1996). However, literature has also shown that 'due to the influence of external factors like school policy, imposed curricula and examinations, incongruence between teachers' beliefs and actions sometimes occurs' (e.g. Davis, Konopak and Readence, 1993, cited in Borg, 1996 (p.2)).

The common intent of all the research on teachers' beliefs and practices has been to determine the kinds of beliefs that lead to effective practice, and the implementation of the knowledge we have in relation to teaching and learning. The assumption is

that if beliefs can be studied in terms of particular teacher behaviour then it may be possible to determine the beliefs teachers should hold and thus assure effective teaching practice. Tom and Valli (1990) (cited in Shelton, 1997) noted that 'this assumption pertains to both educational empiricist and process product research, as well as educational interpretivists who intend to understand teachers' meaning and action and provide what Erickson terms useful suggestions about the practice of teaching'. (p.13)

It is often assumed that for research to be helpful to teachers' work, it must provide ready solutions to classroom problems. There are reasons why research cannot fulfil such a role. Firstly, classroom processes are complex and often unpredictable, and thus generalisations of particular teaching problems, or the effects of particular teaching actions, cannot take account of the unique qualities of each classroom and each teaching situation. Because of the varied contexts in which teachers work, situations may present themselves differently and demand quite different responses. Secondly, teachers themselves bring their own values and beliefs to teaching, which inevitably predisposes them to the selection of particular strategies and the seeking of particular outcomes.

A more feasible and productive role for educational research is in providing the conceptual means by which teachers can reflect upon their own and others' teaching, and consider how it can be changed and developed. McIntyre (1980) (cited in Calderhead, 1984) argued, for example, that 'the contribution of research to teacher

quality lies in its potential to reveal the nature of classroom practice and to allow its critical scrutiny in the context of teacher training and professional development'. (p.119)

Research on teachers' beliefs, thinking and decision-making fulfils that role by providing us with ways of conceptualising teachers' practice and revealing the kinds of knowledge that teachers have acquired, the interpretations they make of classroom events and how such interpretations guide teachers' actions. 'The value of research is not in providing prescriptions of practice or recipes for teaching, but in helping teachers to acquire a better understanding of their practice.' (Calderhead, 1984 (p.120)) In addition, if teachers accept the value of research, they may come to take a more active involvement in the process itself, identifying issues which require investigation and contributing towards a form of research which is practical, relevant and useful in their own professional development. Perhaps a better understanding of what research has to offer might lead to careful planning of the child's experiences, which in turn will enable the child to be taught effectively.

By attempting to make more explicit the nature of teaching expertise, it is hoped that teachers and other practitioners 'may be able to appreciate better the development of teaching through and beyond the "survival stage" and be provided with some explanatory scaffolding themselves as they reflect on their own performance and that of their pupils'. (Aubrey, 1996 (p.150)) Documents such as the Curriculum

Guidance for the Foundation Stage (QCA 2000) that feature elements of good practice during the period of 'early years' can help toward this direction.

The British Government took a step further and with documents such as the National Curriculum (DfES 2000), the National Literacy Strategy (DfES 1998) or the National Numeracy Strategy (DfES 1999) has prescribed how the core subjects and specifically literacy and numeracy should be taught. Despite the fact that some of these documents are not statutory, they have received strong criticisms, which are accompanied by implications that there is a crisis in education, and that especially in reading 'large numbers of children are failing to learn to read'. (Browne, 1998 (p.5))

Browne (1998) may have claimed a lack of evidence to support suggestions about falling standards, yet she acknowledged that 'public and political criticism which have been accompanied by the schools' demand of rapid, quantitative and measurable progress, may mislead teachers into thinking that children can fail to learn to read'. (p.6)

The importance of children becoming competent readers is a key issue for everyone working in the teaching profession. Thus improving the quality of education offered in the schools regarding this specific subject area is one of the most significant aims for every education system.

Yet David Blunkett in the forward to the National Literacy Strategy (DfES 1998) suggested that 'it is teachers themselves who will ensure that our target is met by making a real difference to children in the classroom'. It is important therefore that evidence of the views of classroom teachers should be part of the ongoing debate.

The context, the curriculum and the methods that are used will affect what children learn about reading, the depth of their learning and the future use of their ability. It is therefore important that teachers 'do not lose sight of why children learn to read and continue to use their own professional knowledge to make judgements about how and what children should be taught about reading'. (Browne, 1998 (p.7))

On this understanding this research falls under the area of literacy. Although the emergence of reading and writing has been closely linked (Hall, 1987) in order to understand how each of these two key skills develops, 'it can be useful to take a closer look at each while we understand that they are linked'. Ferreiro (1984) acknowledged this when she stated that 'developmental literacy cannot be understood by isolating some of its components from others, but he goes on to say that it seems very hard to analyse all the components at the same time and in the same depth'. (p.154) (cited in Miller, 1996 (p.11)) As a result, the topic of this research is teachers' beliefs about teaching reading in early years settings. Honing (1996) argued that controversy and confusion in the literacy field today centre around how best to teach children to read. Arguments over the best way to teach children how to read usually reflect fundamental differences in views about the

nature of reading and of learning to read. On the surface, this discussion may be about teaching methods, but the deeper disagreement is about what children have to learn in order to be able to read, in other words, the nature of the reading process.

In an attempt to discuss the processes by which literacy is learnt, the next section of this thesis will present a hierarchy of concepts and skills needed in order for children to learn to read successfully. A second part will present the major theoretical models of the reading process in an attempt to specify the way in which the sub-processes achieve their purpose. The researcher subscribes to the view supported by Clay (1991) who argued that through 'early reading and writing experiences the young learner creates a network of competencies which power subsequent independent literacy learning. It is a theory of generic learning, that is, learning which generates further learning. The generic competencies are constructed by the learner as he works on many kinds of information coming from the printed page in reading or going to the printed page in writing.' (p.1)

2.9 Emergent literacy

Smith (1985) argued that there are two questions in beginning reading, one practical and one theoretical. The practical one is, 'What are the basic insights that children need in order to begin to read?' While the theoretical one is 'Where do the roots of reading lie?' (p.126) Commenting on the 'roots of reading', the next section of this

thesis will discuss the term 'emergent literacy' as a first step towards examining the concepts and skills related to teaching children to read successfully.

Snow et al. (1998) suggested that 'moving towards being a good reader means that a child has gained a functional knowledge of the principles of the culture's writing system. But the foundations start earlier. Prior to real reading children gain functional knowledge of the parts, products, and uses of the writing system and the ways in which reading and oral language activities complement each other and diverge from each other.' (pp.42-43)

The concept of emergent literacy refers to the developmental precursors of formal reading that have their origins early in the life of a child. The term emergent literacy, which was introduced by Clay (1966), has replaced the term pre-reading and is used to describe 'the reading and writing behaviours that precede and develop into conventional literacy'. (Sulzby, 1989 (p.728)) (cited in Riley, 1996 (p.7)) This conceptualisation departs from an older perspective on reading acquisition that sees the process of learning to read as a maturational process. The notion of reading readiness was linked to ideas of 'mental age' and led to the view that the capacity to learn to read was related to children's age-related developmental time tables. This perspective sees the process of learning to read as beginning with formal school-based instruction in reading or with reading readiness skills taught in kindergarten such as letter recognition. The reading readiness approach sets a boundary between the 'real' reading that children are taught in educational settings and everything that

comes before. Readiness programmes were developed as a means of preparing children for reading. Within these programmes, reading and writing were considered as isolated skills to be taught and the programmes were highly structured and sequential, favouring a 'drills and skills' approach to learning (Barratt-Pugh, 2000).

In the late 1970s the emergent literacy perspective challenged the developmental view of literacy learning. Yetta Goodman (1984) (cited in Miller, 1996 (p.7)) used the phrase 'the roots of literacy' to describe the beginnings of reading and writing. This metaphor indicates that home and community can provide environments in which reading and writing can flourish. The emergent literacy term was intended to reinforce the conception which involved children learning in any social context that enables them to develop literacy before they start formal school instruction in reading, writing and spelling. An emergent literacy perspective views literacy-related behaviours occurring in the pre-school period as legitimate and important aspects of the continuum of literacy.

If literacy is an ongoing process and 'emergent reading refers unambiguously to any sort of pre-reading practice' (Saada-Robert, 2004 (p.576)), Snow et al. (1998), in their attempt to examine the process of learning to read, presented a series of skills which can be considered as predictors of later literacy development. Thus, 'Letter and name recognition, phonological awareness, interest in literacy, and cooperation with peers are some of the pre-school accomplishments that are of particular relevance to later academic challenges. Learning that the alphabet is a symbol

system for sounds fits into this stream of development. The ability to use symbols is gradually acquired during the first years of life as children interpret and create first iconic then graphic representations.’ (p.44)

Children’s concepts about literacy are formed from the earliest years by observing and interacting with readers and writers as well as through their own attempts to read and write. Baquedano-Lopez (2003) suggested that children learn language to express, convey, mediate action, emotions and knowledge. It entails learning the symbolic systems shared by members of the community. This semiotic property of language is foundational for understanding form-meaning relationships that are constrained by the phonological, morphological and syntactic principles of language. Hall (1987) further commented on the characteristics of literacy when he suggested that the term ‘emergent’ implies that the development is a gradual process, which takes place from within the child. Literacy is learnt developmentally, it is self-regulated and comes as a result of the fulfilment of real life purposes. Hall (1987) also stressed the importance of creating contexts that facilitate enquiry and provide opportunities to the children to learn skills from those who model the behaviour in natural use.

Whitehurst and Lonigan (1998) (cited in Whitehurst and Lonigan, 2001) proposed that emergent and conventional literacy are derived from individuals’ ability to utilise information from two interdependent domains of information: inside-out and outside-in. The distinction between outside-in and inside-out information sources is

related to, but different from, a distinction in the psychological literature between top-down and bottom-up processing.

Chall (1983) argued that, 'The top-down models relate to the meaning emphasis approaches of beginning reading and stress the first importance of language and meaning for reading comprehension and word recognition. The reader theoretically samples the text in order to confirm and modify the initial hypothesis. The bottom-up models view reading as a process developing from perception of letters, spelling patterns and words, to sentence and paragraph meaning, are code emphasis beginning reading approaches.' (pp.28-29)

In an attempt to define whole language, the researcher subscribes to the operational definition given by Froese (1991) who saw whole language as a 'child centered literature-based approach to teaching that immerses students in real communication situations whenever possible'. (p.2) By 'literature-based' Froese (1991) referred to 'textual materials of all kinds from fiction to informational materials which are used to promote language learning'. By 'real communication' Froese (1991) argued 'for interested listeners who are involved whenever possible in the linguistic effort'. (p.2) Froese (1991) went on to suggest that the whole language approach is a philosophy and presents the fundamental aspects of the approach. 'First language is a naturally developing human activity and as a result is a social phenomenon used for communication purposes. Language learning and teaching must be personalised in order to respect the uniqueness and interest of the learner. Finally, language learning

is considered to be part of making sense of the world. Language need not be learned separately first. Language is learnt holistically and in context rather than in pieces in isolation.' (Froese, 1991 (p.2))

An alternative approach to reading acquisition, phonics, is characterised by the notion that everything on a page is processed and that reading is primarily a hierarchical series of decisions. 'First words are recognised then a syntactic processing occurs and finally a semantic interpretation is made based on the sentence syntax. Furthermore, these processes are controlled by textual input, word recognition precedes comprehension of meaning.' (Weaver and Resnick, 1979 (p.13)) Adams (1992) argued that 'the parts of the hierarchically layered reading system must grow together. In order for the connections and even the connecting parts to develop properly they must develop conjointly. For the dependency to work, both directions and skills must be linked together in the course of acquisition. Thus the challenge is that of understanding the parts of the system and its interrelationships. As the parts of the system are defined and developed in proper relation to one another, each guides and reinforces the growth of the other.' (p.6)

The two positions suggest difference in prioritisation of processes. The difference of opinion questions what the children have to learn in order to be able to read. This is why the next section of this chapter will begin the presentation of the concepts and skills involved in the reading process each of which has a different function and a different mode of operation.

2:10 The ability to decode

Due to the fact that the ability to read is a means towards language learning, the importance of decoding as a reading skill has been acknowledged from the whole language as well as the phonics approach of reading instruction. It is the way that the decoding process is thought to take place that makes the difference between the two approaches.

Goodman (1971) argued that decoding involves linguistic guesswork, where the reader samples graphic information but relies mainly on context cues to recover the meaning of the word. Readers recognise whole words as visual shapes by sampling some of the words and by using their understanding of the rest of the sentence to reach a meaningful conclusion.

What a reader thinks s/he sees is only part of what s/he actually processed and mainly what s/he expects. There is a process by guessing of using minimal cues, of selecting the cues that carry the most information. Beginning cues in reading may be graphic, but the reader also brings to the task his/her knowledge of the way the language works. The knowledge of the grammatical system makes it possible for him/her to predict from the key graphic symbols what the structure would be. Equally important though, since this is a meaning seeking process, 'the reader has anticipated and is setting up an expectation semantically. S/he builds up a semantic context in which s/he tries things out. This need to confirm the guess on the basis of

one's knowledge of the language and of the meaning that one brings to it, is perhaps the strongest argument for why kids from the very beginning have to encounter meaningful language in their reading materials.' (p.57)

Contrary to this, for the bottom-up approach, decoding is the process of identifying written words using the alphabetic code to determine their pronunciation and meaning. This is why the next section of this chapter will present decoding as one of the ways in which phonological processing is instrumental in the reading process.

2.11 Phonological processing

Stainthorp (2003) argued that 'the basis of any alphabetic writing system is the alphabetic principle. Children have to understand this principle and how it works. However, in order to come to an understanding of this principle and to use it in grapheme-phoneme correspondence as a tool to identify words on a page, they have to be able to abstract phonemes of their own accents and become explicitly phonologically aware.' (p.214) Stainthorp (2003) went on to suggest that 'reading in an alphabetic system is founded on phonological processing. This means that in order to read words children have to be able to develop an ability to make an accurate translation from the visual stimulus to the phonological counterpart of a word.' (p.215)

In the same line of argument, the ability to decode is a product of understanding the alphabetic principle and underpins literacy growth. Ehri (1998) suggested that a way through which the decoding process could be facilitated is by retrieving sight words from memory. Sight of the written word activates its spelling, pronunciation and meaning immediately in memory without any decoding steps required. When sight words are known well enough, readers can recognise meanings and pronunciations automatically. To explain sight word reading, it needs to be specified how readers can look at and recognise specific words as well as store and remember new words. Ehri (1998) suggested that 'the kind of process that lies at the heart of sight word reading is a connection-forming process. Connections are formed that link words to their pronunciations and meanings and this information is stored in the reader's mental dictionary or lexicon.' (p.12) Findings of Ehri's research suggested that readers learn sight words by forming connections with graphemes in the spellings and phonemes underlying the pronunciations of individual words. The ability to achieve that indicates that the readers have an understanding of the basic alphabetic principle. This requires awareness that language can be analysed into strings of separable words and words in turn into sequences of syllables and phonemes within syllables.

Ehri can be considered as a stage theorist who proposed that there are qualitative differences in the course of learning to read. Different stages in the development of reading are marked by reliance on qualitatively different types of information. To capture the changes that occur in the development of sight word reading, Ehri (1998)

distinguished four phases characterised by the involvement of the alphabetic system. The decision to present these four phases is based on the fact that they demonstrate the complexities of print processing and explain the processes of development that enable the pre-reading child equipped with a spoken language system and a visual system to bring things together in a new system for making sense of print. Ehri's model is a developmental model explaining the mechanisms of change and progress. The phases are given below.

Pre-alphabetic: During this phase beginners remember how to read sight words by forming connections between selected visual attributes of words and their pronunciations or meanings and storing these associations in their memory. Ehri called this activity 'visual cue reading'. This phase is called pre-alphabetic because of the letter-sound connections. The child reads words as logograms or as wholes. During this phase the children have the desire to remember how to read words but they cannot take advantage of the systematic relations between letters and sounds. By default they resort to noticing and remembering visually silent cues. But visually based connections are idiosyncratic rather than systematic and are often arbitrary making them much harder to remember.

Partial alphabetic: In this phase beginners form partial alphabetic connections between some of the letters in written words and sounds detected in their pronunciations. Because first and final letters are especially silent these are often selected as the cues to be remembered. This phase is called 'phonetic cue reading'.

To remember sight words this way, partial alphabetic readers need to know the relevant letter sound correspondences and they need to be able to segment initial and final sounds in words. The reason that the connections formed are partial rather than complete is that readers lack full knowledge of the spelling system and particularly the vowels. They also do not know how to segment speech into phonemic units that match up with the graphemic units. If beginners are to successfully achieve this task they have to be taught to perceive shared sounds in words, to segment initial sounds in the pronunciations of words and to recognise how letters symbolise initial sounds in words. Knowing the alphabetic system greatly facilitates the task of forming and remembering relevant connections between letters and their pronunciations.

Full alphabetic: During this phase beginners remember how to read sight words by forming complete connections between letters seen in the written forms of words and phonemes detected in their pronunciations. This is possible because readers understand how most graphemes symbolise phonemes in the conventional spelling system. One advantage of representing sight words more completely in memory is that word reading becomes much more accurate. Another characteristic of this phase is the ability to decode words never read before by blending letters into a pronunciation. This enables full-phase readers to form fully connected sight words in memory. The fact that readers in the full alphabetic phase possess full representation of sight words in addition to the decoding skill allows them to utilise the analogy strategy.

Consolidated alphabetic: The ability of the readers in full alphabetic phase to retain complete information about the spellings of sight words in memory makes it possible for their print lexicons to grow rapidly as they encounter different words in their reading. As fully connected patterns of more words are retained in memory the patterns that recur across different words become consolidated. Consolidation allows readers to operate with multi-letter units that may be morphemes, syllables or intra-syllabic units such as onsets and rimes. These letter patterns become part of a reader's generalised knowledge of the spelling system.

(Adapted from Ehri, 1998 (pp.17-24))

Ehri (1998) went on to suggest that 'there are three grapho-phonetic capabilities that enable beginners to secure complete representations of sight words in memory. Knowledge of letter shapes, knowledge of how graphemes typically symbolise phonemes in words and phonemic segmentation skill.' (p.15) Bialby (1994) suggested that learning letters facilitates the perception that spellings represent sounds; 'The phonological discipline of spelling trains orthographic processing in systematic directionality; and orthographic segmentation and directionality train phonological processing in phonemic discrimination. These processes develop the ability to read new words by applying spelling-sound correspondence rules, the processing of words as letter sequences, the recognition of frequent letter sequences in letter strings, and the processing of letter strings in phonological chunks.' (p.73)

Watson (2001) also suggested that ‘the phonemic segmentation performance of the alphabetic literates corresponds to alphabetic orthographic units or letters. Pre-literates usually segment words into phonemic units such as onsets and rimes. The conceptual categories with which the phonemic segmentation task is accomplished are influenced by the properties of the orthography acquired in learning to read. The users of logographic or syllabic scripts appear to form the conceptual categories of their spoken language that correspond to the orthographic elements that they use in order to read and write. Any orthography then necessarily creates conceptual categories for thinking about language in that it requires the user to segment the stream of speech into units that can be described with that orthography.’ (p.44)

At the same time, Snow et al. (1998) argued that ‘phonemic and phonological awareness are not just terms for phonemic segmentation. In addition, they are terms that indicate that if higher order dimensions of literacy growth are to be achieved, productive learning about decoding and spelling necessarily builds on prior understandings.’ (p.56)

Goswami (1998) discussed at length the skills and mechanisms that assist fluent reading development. She placed emphasis on phonological awareness and its interrelatedness with print processing. She proposed the conceptualisation of reading as an ‘interactive developmental process from the very earliest phases. Within this view children’s orthographic knowledge is founded in their phonological skills. In other words, the phonological knowledge that children bring with them to reading

plays an important role in establishing orthographic recognition units from the earliest stages of development. During the developmental process, phonological and orthographic knowledge continuously interact in increasingly refined ways. A child's phonological knowledge will partly determine that child's learning about orthography and that orthographic learning will in turn change the level of the child's phonological knowledge.' (Goswami, 1998 (pp.53-54)) If we accept this argument then the next issue to be addressed is: What facilitates phonological awareness?

2:12 What facilitates phonological awareness?

Goswami and Bryant (1990) suggested that the process of learning to read could be characterised as a set of causal connections. A connection between rhyme and alliteration and later knowledge in reading and spelling, a connection between tuition at the level of the phoneme and the development of phonemic awareness (which was suggested to be rapid following such tuition), and a connection between progress in spelling and progress in reading. It was emphasised that the theory suggested by Goswami and Bryant (1990) 'was not a theory about stages because children, according to them, did not take a series of identifiable steps when learning to read and to spell'. (p.146) More specifically Goswami and Bryant (1990) argued that 'children are sensitive to the sounds in words long before they learn to read, and they also categorise words by their sounds. But these sounds are not always phonemes. The important phonological units for young children are onset and rime.

The phonological skill that children bring to reading is the ability to divide a word into its onset and its rime and also to categorise words which have the same onset or the same rime.' (p.147) Bielby (1994) argued that the concepts of onset and rime refer to sounds and not to spellings and are the fundamental units of speech-sounds which untutored children are able to identify but not to further analyse. They are important because they give children access to spelling-sound relationships. Since children are speakers before they are readers, their initial sense of word is phonological and through these sound images children have a first access to meaning.

Goswami and Bryant (1990) suggested that these inferences are one of the main phonological activities in the early stages of reading. Children who are sensitive to rhyme eventually do better in reading and children who are taught about rhyme are more successful at reading than those who are not given this training. The second causal factor refers to a connection between tuition at the level of the phoneme and the development of phonemic awareness, and indicates how the child learns phonemic segmentation in the early stages of beginning conventional reading. This skill is developed by reading, but it is also a prerequisite in achieving the alphabetic phase of reading development. Onset and rime facilitate children's early spelling but there is discrepancy and a separation between children's reading and spelling. One way to demonstrate this separation is the fact that young children cannot read words that they know how to spell and also fail to spell some words that they can read. The first two connections are thought to be linked because rhyming ability was

considered as a predictor of children's ability to detect phonemes. Only the third causal connection between spelling and reading was considered to involve qualitative change although it was made clear 'that this idea is still speculative'. (p.149)

Bielby (1994) suggested that 'Goswami's model of reading can be characterised as a process of increasingly refined phonological orthographic analogy. Reading is perceived as a process of development through which children make progressively subtler inferences about the mapping of sounds onto spellings. As reading develops the phonological underpinning that was initially based upon onsets and rimes comes to reflect phonemic knowledge. This is a process largely of analysing down to phonemes not building up from phonemes.' (p.85) The process of inference by analogy can refine the recognition units within words until a complete phonemic underpinning is established.

Goswami (1998) further discussed the importance of orthographic analogies in children's reading. She suggested that 'an orthographic analogy involves using a shared spelling sequence to make a prediction about a shared pronunciation'. She also suggested that rime analogies are easier than analogies based on the onset and part of the rime. Rime analogies also emerge first, developmentally appearing in children's spontaneous reading behaviour before analogies based on the onset and part of the rime. Analogies based on rimes are typically the only analogies made by very young readers. Once a child has been reading for a period of six to eight

months then other analogies are also observed. Analogies work in addition to contextual information, and do depend on spelling patterns and are not the result of a simple form of rhyme priming. Through the review of literature conducted by Goswami (1998) it was suggested that 'phonological skills predict reading development in all orthographies but the special connection between rhyming and English may be a direct result of the properties of the English orthography which makes rime units particularly useful for word recognition in English'. (p.49) Goswami and Bryant (1990) continued to argue that as a result of their sensitivity to onset and rime, children are able to make inferences or analogies about new words on the basis of spelling patterns in words they already know, and that they do this as soon as they begin to read. Children make similar inferences when they spell.

Treiman (1998) also discussed how spelling can facilitate phonological awareness. She suggested that 'learning to spell a word may not guarantee the ability to read it. Despite this it will help children's reading development by giving them practice in segmenting spoken words into phonemes and relating phonemes to graphemes.' She continued to suggest that children may find it easier to use an alphabetic strategy in spelling rather than in reading. 'Spelling places fewer demands on memory. Children can write down phonemes as they come to them in analysing a word rather than holding them in memory until the end of the word and then blending them together to form a unified pronunciation. Another reason that children may use the phonological approach for spelling before they do for reading is that the alternative logographic or pre-alphabetic is easier to use in reading. Having experienced some

success in “reading” through the use of environmental print children may be reluctant to go beyond using a logographic approach. In contrast, memorising the entire spelling of a word with no alphabetic support is hard and thus children are led to look for some principled way of remembering the spelling of a word based on its sound.’ (pp.289-300)

This section of the chapter indicated that during the first years of learning to read children’s reading skills change rapidly from an initial series of separate skills to a more ‘holistic’ pattern of word recognition. During this process the skills interact reciprocally with each other. Phonological skills assist in the children’s acquisition of letter knowledge and together with short-term auditory memory facilitates initial development of reading. The acquisition of phonological skills such as phonemic discrimination helped further develop short-term memory performance. Spelling was regarded as an indicator of reading achievement and spelling development depended on alphabetic and grapho-phonetic skills. Phonological processes play a crucial role in organising our visual perception of print into meaningful patterns. These processes facilitate the learning of visual recognition units, which are the foundation of orthographic reading.

2.13 Orthographic processing

The orthographic phase of reading development, according to Adams (1990), Bielby (1994), and Pinnell and Fountas (1998), is the one in which words are identified

directly from their spellings. Since spellings are a matter of sequences and relationships between letters, what we are looking for in the orthographic phase is the development of the identification and recognition of spelling patterns. Alphabetic strategies in reading have the effect of directing attention to all the letters in their sequence. At the same time, the phonological patterns in words focus visual attention to the corresponding spelling sequences. Orthographic processing is a function of the visual processing system, which, as rules of procedure in dealing with print, has the identification of letters and the directional scanning of print. In order to examine what a child has to learn it is necessary to examine what a skilled reader does. The bottom-up approach suggests that the first step is the fixation of the eye on not only nearly all the individual words in the text, but also on the letters of each word. Visual information from a number of fixations is integrated allowing for visual overlaps to retain the coherence and serial order of the information.

The letters are processed according to their graphic features and their position in the letter string. Since a number of letters can be resolved visually at the same time, the reader does not identify letters one at a time but in 'eyefuls' taking sequence into account. This is possible because, for the fluent reader, letter identification processes in familiar letter strings mutually reinforce and support each other. At the same time English spelling is not entirely irregular. Reading experience establishes statistically weighted connections between letters according to the frequency of their occurring together in spelling patterns.

As a consequence, each letter will prime the recognition of other associated letters according to the strength of their connections. The effect of mutual reinforcement accelerates the identification of familiar words and spelling patterns. The way in which encountered spelling patterns become bound together as perceptual chunks promotes what eventually becomes an automatised recognition system. Overall it is suggested that learning to read is a matter of construction of an evolving network of associations between pronunciations and spelling patterns. Despite the fact that spelling is complicated, a simplified mechanism can work – the strength of letter association encodes the irregularities in the input. Its critical characteristics include the ability to recognise familiar words, include regularities to apply to new words and yet be capable of learning irregular and exception words. The input material needs to be phonological and the orthographic information associated in a way that facilitates the development of chunking.

Goswami and Bryant (1990) drew attention to onset and rime as a way to encourage alertness to phonological structures. While Adams (1990) drew attention to the syllable itself which, as well as a perceptual auditory unit, is a function of speech production. Since written English is alphabetic and follows the patterns of speech, it follows that written syllables should include vowels. Ehri (1992) talked about the importance of sight vocabulary and phonetic reading in the development of the word recognition process. Ehri (1992) suggested that the primary access to meaning in phonetic or orthographic reading involves the phonological process of pronunciation as a pre-requisite of accessing meaning. She argued that ‘the spelling itself is used to

enter lexical memory and locate the word's pronunciation. No intermediate translation is required. Recoding rules may be used to set up this rule. However, when the word has been recoded, the rule, the translation, and the phonological matching routines drop out to be substituted by specific connections linking the spelling directly to its pronunciation in memory.' (p.120) What this indicates is that what has to be learnt are not explicit correspondence rules but associations that operate at a subconscious level.

This section addressed orthographic awareness as one of the sources of information about which a reader must develop skills and knowledge that allow a translation of print into phonological representations. However, being able to say a word is only a part of reading. The reader must understand those auditory derivations, which involves placing them in the correct conceptual and contextual framework. The importance of context and syntax in finding meaning will be discussed in the next section of this chapter.

2.14 The importance of context and syntax

Smith (1982) suggested that children learn by relating their understanding of the new to what they know already and in the process they modify or elaborate on their prior knowledge. He also argued that there are two aspects of language that are relevant to an understanding of reading. These are the surface structure, which includes the visual information that presents itself to the brain through the eyes, and the meaning

that we bring into it and is located in the deep structure. According to Smith (1982), syntax (word order) is the bridge between the surface and the deep structure of language. In this line of argument grammar does not reveal meaning. Meaning must precede grammatical analysis. Not only is it impossible to state the grammatical function of individual words outside of a meaningful context, but it is also impossible to state the grammatical function of sentences without prior understanding of their meaning.

For Goodman (1967) reading was a psycholinguistic guessing game in which the child predicts or guesses the next word. In this guessing game the child uses various contextual clues derived both from the grammar and the meaning of the preceding text. Goodman's model of the reading process proceeds through the following.

- Sampling – choosing cues from the visible text to provide the minimum amount of information necessary to get effectively to a meaning.
- Predicting – anticipating meaning using the meaning of the text so far and the grammar to predict the next word.
- Confirming – monitoring the progress and checking to see if predictions are confirmed by the text and if the reading makes sense.
- Correcting – when mismatches between predictions and cues or when reading appears not to be making sense.

Prediction and intention, according to Smith (1982), are the two things that limit the interpretations of reading. 'What exactly do we predict when we read? The fundamental answer is meaning, although we look at words and letters that will confirm, or not, particular meanings. A number of more specific and detailed predictions may be made and tested simultaneously and constantly modified as we read. Every prediction however will be derived from our more general expectation of where the text might be leading.' (pp.76-77) Smith (1982) also argued that reading is context dependant and thus the ability to make use of contextual cues to meaning is crucial. Since prediction facilitates comprehension of reading then familiarity with the conventions of written language is necessary.

The usefulness of context as one of the processors facilitating word identification has been acknowledged by advocates of the phonics approach as well. According to Adams (1990) and Bielby (1994) there are specific processes for identifying the words and for selecting the contextually relevant meanings. Word identification takes place through the help of three processors: context, orthographic and meaning processors. The context processor deals with existing knowledge and helps make a selection from possible choices based on the orthographic form of the word. 'This processor is responsible for constructing a coherent ongoing interpretation of the text.' (Adams, 1990 (p.138)) The orthographic processor takes visual information from the print on the page, identifies letters and recognises their sequential organisation. The response depends on the speed and accuracy with which letters are perceived and the familiarity of word spelling patterns. Finally, the meaning

processor receives and co-ordinates information from the other two processors. It also enters our mental dictionary (lexicon), which includes some information about the word's orthographic form, as well as the word's meaning. So for a known word, if the information of the orthographic processor matches with the existing information in the lexicon, the word can be identified.

The response depends on the context, the quality of the orthographic and phonological input and the strength of the associations between a word's meaning and its orthographic and phonological representation.

But the context processor influences the meaning processor since the reader uses his/her knowledge of the world (semantics) and of language (syntax) together with his/her understanding of the alphabetical symbols (visual/orthographic) to make predictions. At the same time the newly identified meanings in the context processor affect the next meaning to be in the context processor. The context of meaning is continually developing. The final step is for the reader to mentally represent the sounds underlying spoken words, perceive their relationship to letter patterns and use that knowledge to search for the potential shapes associated with those letter patterns as an assistance to finding the right words stored in memory. On the one hand, a single letter phoneme correspondence may be used for providing reading responses, and on the other phoneme correspondences are determined for all the letters of the word. When more than one phoneme correspondence exists it may be combined by the reader to form a phonological component. Whether it is a

phonological component or a single initial phoneme, the information is matched with a learner's existing speaking/listening vocabulary.

This section indicated that depending on which approach you follow in terms of the reading process, context and syntax facilitate prediction or work together with phonological awareness and semantics toward the development of phonological recoding. Regardless of the approach followed, context and syntax contribute to reading success by guiding the comprehension of sentences. How meaning is constructed from a text is going to be discussed in the next section of this chapter.

2:15 Comprehension

Goodman (1973) suggested that readers utilise three cue systems simultaneously – grapho-phonetic, syntactic, and semantic. The semantic input goes beyond the meaning of words and indicates the reader's 'sufficient experience and conceptual background to feed into the reading process so that s/he can make sense of what s/he is reading. These cue systems are used simultaneously and interdependently. What constitutes useful graphic information depends on how much syntactic and semantic information is available.' (p.25) According to Bielby (1994), comprehension also goes beyond the explicit in the text and involves two main elements: a) integrating the meaning of the different sentences and the inferences drawn from reading between the lines, and b) constructing the appropriate mental model or schema incorporating both new and established knowledge into a coherent whole.

A schema can help the formulation of a hypothesis since, according to Garner (1987), it is a set of expectations (p.4) that plays an important role in the interpretation of new information. If the new information fits those expectations then the information is encoded into the memory. That is because, as Richardson (1994) argued, comprehension relates to the organisation of knowledge into large abstract units of information called schemata. A schema is a memory structure, which represents a generic concept. It can remain stable or be changed by future learning. A schema is considered to have four properties: 'a) procedural information which allows the activation of the schema and the instantiation of the schema with information from the text, b) inheritance which allows properties from higher level schemata to be inherited by their embedded sub-schemata, c) default values which allow inferences to be made when all information is not available from another source such as a text, and d) an organisational structure which is basically hierarchical'. (Ruddell and Spence, 1985 (p.770)) The reader, in order to understand a piece of text, must categorise or attach the understood message to the appropriate schema. 'Incoming information that is according to expectations is encoded to memory so that slots in the schema are instantiated. Information that does not fit expectations may not be encoded or may be distorted. The expectations that guide encoding of information also guide its retrieval.' (Anderson, 1984) (cited in Garner, 1987 (p.4))

Smith (1988) called comprehension meaning identification in order to emphasise that it is an active process. What readers comprehend from the text is always relative

to what they know and what they want to know. If comprehension is goal directed we actively seek information to be interpreted. Just as expectations embodied by certain activated schemata can serve an important function in guiding our process of information input, so these same schemata guide our information seeking process.

Comprehension is also acknowledged as one of the main skills that reading involves from the phonics as well as the whole language approach. The skills involved in the visual recognition of printed words are only one component of the reading process. In order for these skills to be useful they need to be guided by language comprehension. It is the way that the process of comprehension takes place that once again makes the difference.

For the phonics approach, comprehension is seen as a hierarchically layered process. At the bottom level the reader must retrieve the meaning of each individual word. At the second level readers must periodically put their word-by-word progress through the text so as to interpret the collective significance of the chain of words they have read. Adams (1990) argued that the performance of that skill depends on two factors: 'the ability to recognise the opportunity for which recoding is most appropriate and the ease and speed with which the individual words are recognised'. (p.141) In the third and final level the reader has to combine his/her understanding of the interpreted word to the whole interpretation of the text so as to understand the meaning. Critical and inferential activities are necessary as well as active attention and thought if the reader is to achieve understanding.

On the other hand, Goodman (1973) argued that comprehension is the prime objective in reading. Everything else is either a skill to be used in achieving comprehension or a use to be made of comprehension. Bielby (1994) argued that a child comes to reading with an existing knowledge of his/her language system. That means that to some extent the child has linguistic awareness, which is the knowledge of the basic components of language. This has been called the reader's lexico-grammatical system. Readers develop implicit awareness of the phonological and lexical systems through their interactions with other language users (i.e. the fact that certain sounds are likely to follow others or that combinations of sounds can be stressed differently and as a result differ in their meanings, or the fact that words have to be put in sequence in order to play their correct role in sentences). Children apply this awareness within a range of structures to the task of reading and as a result of this task the awareness becomes broader and more explicit.

For Smith (1988) syntax was considered as 'a set of interrelations which represent the rules that determine how elements of language must be related to each other in speech or writing'. (p.13) For Underwood and Batt (1996), collecting visual information, combining it with knowledge in the lexicon, and making use of the syntax rules were the three steps that make possible the form of representation. Finally, Thompson et al. (1993) argued that 'it is the combination of language prediction skills (i.e. syntactic awareness) and emerging phonological recoding skills that provides the basis for acquiring the basic reading skills'. (p.140) At the same time, Smith (1985) argued that 'the two best clues to any word are its total context –

the meaning in which it is embedded – and its similarity to words that are already known’. (p.65)

The usefulness of context in terms of reading comprehension is acknowledged from the phonics approach as well. Context can facilitate the comprehension by speeding the process of recognising unknown words by helping in overcoming syntactic boundaries. But most importantly, context combined with recognition skills facilitates decoding and this is what makes the difference between comprehension and word calling.

The aim of this section was to demonstrate that the developing reader learns to process print in increasingly refined and efficient ways. The child is using to greater advantage the different strategies available from the text, namely contextual, semantic and syntactic cues, as well as orthographic and phonological understanding. Clay (1991) called this integration ‘the construction of inner control through which the children draw on all their understandings and skills in order to become independent and fluent readers’. (cited in Riley, 1996 (p.10)) The aim of this section was to present the key skills and abilities involved in the reading process. How these skills and abilities operate within the reading process is illustrated in bottom-up, top-down and interactive models of reading, which will be presented in the next section of this chapter.

2:16 Theoretical orientations to reading – the reading process

Adams (1990) presented skilful reading as a ‘whole complex system of skills and knowledge’. (p.3) The theoretical beliefs of the reading process are usually based on the three prevalent views described as top-down, bottom-up and interactive.

Gough (1972) argued that the reader is a fluent decoder who makes no use of context in his/her attempt to read. Instead, reading is assumed to develop in a series of discrete stages of information processing. Learning to read is a hierarchically based process where deep and thorough knowledge of letters, spelling patterns and words, and of the phonological translations of all three, are of inseparable importance to reading acquisition. According to Gough (1972), ‘the reader converts characters into systematic phonemes. The child must learn to do so. The reader knows the rules that relate one set of abstract entities to another; the child does not. The reader is a decoder, the child must become one.’ (p.676)

Proponents of the bottom-up model of reading process argue that reading starts at the bottom (with the text and less complex skills) and moves towards the top (use of more complex skills that lead to meaning acquisition). Many advocates of this perspective argue that meaning cannot be constructed from the text until students are able to recognise every word in the selection. The bottom-up model demonstrates a linear and hierarchical process from the glimpse of the printed word to the completion of decoding.

The process outlined in this model is as follows:

- 1) It begins with a visual fixation of information.
- 2) The lexicon registers this visual information until another fixation is made available.
- 3) The scanner follows (with the help of pattern recognition routines held in long-term memory) which identifies a fixation as a sequence of letters operating from left to right.
- 4) A string of letters is placed on the character register.
- 5) The decoder maps the characters onto a string of systematic phonemes.
- 6) The message is stored into the phonemic tape.
- 7) The librarian, with the help of the lexicon, identifies the sequence holding them in primary memory.
- 8) The sentence can be passed by a comprehensive device which draws upon syntactic and semantic rules to analyse the sentence and place it in a more stable form of storage termed TPWSGWTAU (The place where sentences go when they are understood). (cited in Cummings, 1998 (p.20))

Rumelhart (1985) argued that, 'for Gough, reading consists of a sequentially ordered set of transformations. The input signal is first registered in the icon and then transformed from a character level representation, to phonemic representation and finally to deep structural representation. Thus the input is sequentially transformed from low-level sensory information into higher-level encodings. The information

flow is “bottom-up”. This means that the information is initiated with the sensory signal and no higher level of processing can affect any lower level.’ (pp.723-724)

Various terms have been used to describe different models that reflect this reading process, for example, text base transmission reductionists and behaviourists. All models are prototypes to some extent, but at the same time each model stresses the flow of information acquisition from visual to vocal with the major difference being reflected in the degree of automaticity in processing. The process of deriving meaning from print is triggered by information embodied in the print. Readers engage in this process by identifying letter features, linking these features together to recognise letters, combining letters into spelling patterns, linking the patterns to recognise words, and finally proceeding to sentences, paragraphs and entire text to derive meaning.

According to Thompson, Tenmer and Nicholson (1993) the strength of the Gough (1972) model was that it showed ‘how the reader might process print without using context. The model is able to show the importance of letter-sound correspondences and why they are difficult for the children to acquire. The model also raises a problem for the use of context. It is argued that guessing would probably be a result of decoding failure. So rather than a positive sign, the use of context might be a cause for concern.’ (p.108)

On the other hand, top-down theorists have seen reading as the sampling of textual information in order to test hypotheses. Goodman (cited in Hall, Ribovich and Raming, 1978) argued that reading is a selective process. 'It involves partial use of available minimal language cues selected from perceptual input on the basis of the reader's expectations. As this partial information is processed tentative decisions are made to be confirmed, rejected or refined as reading progresses.' (p.7)

Reading for meaning is an essential component of all reading situations. The reader has hypotheses of the meaning of the passage being read and uses the lower levels of analysis to check out these hypotheses.

Readers learn to read by being exposed to written language in much the same way as they learn to speak by being exposed to spoken language. The difference is that they can use their knowledge of spoken language and its constraints to help them to understand the written text. So when children meet a written word whose meaning defeats them they can use their understanding of the meaning of the rest of the sentence in order to reach a reasonable conclusion. Thus 'the fundamental force behind learning to read is the reader's knowledge of spoken language and their use of context to help them learn new words'. (Bryant, 1993 (p.83))

The Goodman (1976) model exemplified reading as a top-down process. The steps to achieve reading are as follows:

- 1) An eye movement fixates on new material.

- 2) The reader selects graphic cues from the field of vision.
- 3) A perceptual image of part of the text is formed.
- 4) An image results from what the reader sees and expects to see, based on his strategies, cognitive styles, knowledge and contextual constraints from previously analysed material.
- 5) The reader searches his memory for related syntactic, semantic and phonological cues to enhance the perceptual image.
- 6) The reader makes a guess or a tentative choice consistent with graphic cues. If it is successful it is held in medium-term memory. If not the reader tries again.
- 7) Finally the hypothesis is tested against knowledge for grammatical and syntactic acceptability. If it fits it is stored in long-term memory and predictions are made about the forthcoming text. If not the process is repeated.

Literature provides several different views of top-down models. Reader-based transactional, psycholinguistic and constructivist are a few of the most common terms reflecting this form of processing. Although each model is different, all are common in that they are conceptually driven and meaning proceeds from whole to part.

Each also exemplifies the same basic process characteristics. They are as follows:

- 1) The process of translating print into meaning begins with the reader's prior knowledge that is initiated by making predictions about the meaning of a unit of print.

- 2) Meaning and grammatical cues, as well as graphic cues, aid in the identification of unknown words found in reading selections and emphasise language units that begin with the whole text, paragraphs and sentences.
- 3) Students are engaged in this meaning-driven process while they are involved in reading, writing, speaking and listening activities.

The strength of the model is its focus on children's reading strategies in text situations. Goodman analysed the unexpected responses that the readers produced and he called them miscues. 'These miscues occur because the reader is not simply responding to print with accurate word identifications. S/he is processing information in order to reconstruct the message. In a sense the reader uses each graphic cue available to him/her, reading is not an exact process at all. Instead the reader engages in a form of information processing in which s/he uses his/her knowledge of how language works, and is selective in choosing graphic cues and predicting language structures.' (Goodman, 1970) (cited in Gollasch, 1982 (p.22))

It is not in the scope of this literature review to critique the main lines of argument regarding the process of reading. If teachers are theoretical in their instructional approach, something that is considered as tentative in this research, the presentation of the main models of teaching reading facilitates the development of positive and 'cognitively clear' perceptions of the reading process or skill, depending on the theoretical position from which one looks at it.

There are two fundamental differences between these positions. One difference concerns which aspect of language plays the most important part in learning to read. The first position concentrates on phonology, where as the second on syntax and semantics. The second difference is that one position holds that many of the reader's previous experiences with spoken language will make it difficult for them to come to grips with the new demands imposed by their first encounters with the alphabet. The other, on the contrary, states that learning to read is a natural outgrowth of learning, skills and experiences of spoken language will provide a platform for learning about written language.

Finally, according to Wray (1991), attempts have been made to combine the strength of bottom-up and top-down models of reading. He argued that these models can be termed interactive, and 'acknowledge that reading is both a perceptual and cognitive process in which the reader uses both previous experiences and the code features of the text to create meaning'. (p.100)

Rumelhart (1977), according to Smith (1979), characterised reading as an interactive process involving a conjunction of 'visually derived' and 'expectation derived' information. Rumelhart (1977) and others adopted computer terminology to refer to the flow of 'visually derived' information as bottom-up and the opposite flow of 'expectation derived' information as top-down (p.38).

Rumelhart and McClelland (1981) also suggested that 'the reader begins with a set of expectations about what information is likely to be available through visual input. These expectations are based on our knowledge of the structure of letters, words, phrases and larger pieces of discourse, including non-linguistic aspects of the current contextual situation. As visual information from the page begins to become more available, it strengthens those hypotheses that are consistent with the input and weakens those that are inconsistent. The stronger hypotheses in turn make even more specific predictions about the information available in the visual input to the degree that these hypotheses are confirmed, they are further strengthened and the process is facilitated.' (p.37)

In the same line of argument, Riley (1996) suggested that 'the visual stimuli of print (orthography) are processed in conjunction with the sound units of print (phonology) they represent. The stimulation has three-way processing, each aspect informing and clarifying the others as it feeds into the meaning and context processors. Meaning provides the dynamo for the whole activity of reading, giving it purpose.' (p.23)

Section 3

2:17 Teachers' beliefs about the teaching of reading

Harste and Burke (1977) defined reading teachers' theoretical beliefs as the philosophical principles, or belief systems, that guide teachers' expectations about student behaviour and the decisions they make during a reading lesson.

Theories and beliefs make up an important part of teachers' general knowledge through which teachers perceive, process and act upon information in the classroom.

'They are a set of conceptual representations which signify to its holder a reality or given state of affairs of sufficient validity, truth or trustworthiness to warrant reliance upon it as a guide to personal thought and action.' (Harvey, 1986 (p.660))
(cited in Fang, 1996 (pp.29-30))

According to Fang (1996) a teacher's beliefs are shaped by many factors. Among them 'the quality of discipline cultures, the quality of pre-service experience and the opportunity for reflection on the pre-service experience. In practice these beliefs can take many forms; they can be embodied among others in the teacher's expectations of his/her students' performance, or the teacher's theories about a particular subject area's learning and teaching.' (p.30)

Teachers' beliefs and practices in the literacy domain have been influenced, according to Fang (1996), to a greater or lesser extent by the three models of the reading process. The three main models or philosophies are frequently referred to as bottom-up, top-down and interactive models.

Reading research has examined how teachers' thinking about teaching and learning affects their decision-making and behaviours. Studies like Harste and Burke (1977), Magano and Allen (1986) and Richardson et al. (1991) supported the notion that teachers do possess theoretical beliefs towards reading and that such beliefs tend to shape the nature of their instructional practices.

Working with teachers from Grades 4, 5, and 6, Richardson et al. (1991) found that teachers' beliefs relate to their classroom practice. They found that teachers who believed that the sub-skills of reading must be learned before the meaning of text can be determined generally used a skills word approach. On the other hand those who believed that learning to read is accomplished by reading, employed a structuralist approach. Moreover, those who adopt the whole language philosophy used authentic literature as a vehicle through which students can construct meaning. These findings support Harste and Burke's (1977) claim that teachers are theoretical about their instructional approach to reading.

The argument about consistency between beliefs and practices has also been supported by limited research in other areas of literacy instruction. Magano and

Allen (1986) found that teachers approach language arts instruction differently depending on their beliefs about writing. Not only were instructional practices found to be consistent with teachers' beliefs, but also the interaction between teachers and students was found to differ according to teachers' theoretical beliefs about writing instruction.

Wing (1989) found that pre-school teachers' theoretical beliefs about literacy development not only influenced their instructional practices but also shaped pre-school children's perceptions of the nature and uses of reading and writing.

Moreover, Johnson (1992) indicated that the majority of the 'English as a Second Language' teachers hold clearly defined theoretical beliefs and provide instruction consistent with their theoretical orientation.

Richardson, Anders, Tidwell and Lloyd (1991) explored the relationships between beliefs and comprehension practice. The thirty-eight elementary teachers in the study were interviewed to elicit their beliefs about reading comprehension and how children learn to read in general. The teachers were then observed to see if their approach to teaching reading comprehension was consistent with their stated beliefs. The study resulted in a finding that the beliefs of teachers do relate to their instructional practices in the teaching of comprehension.

Stipek, Daniels, Galluzo and Milburn (1992) conducted a study that focused on the social, emotional and academic effects of instructional practices with pre-school and kindergarten children. Teachers responded to a questionnaire, which measured their beliefs regarding instructional practices, then underwent observations to judge actual practices employed. The study resulted in a measurable level of agreement between beliefs and practices.

McGee and Tompkins (1995) studied the relationship of four elementary teachers through personal reflections and lesson plan critiques. Each teacher reflected on his or her theoretical perspective toward reading instruction prior to developing a lesson plan for using a specific story for instruction. The researchers then framed each lesson plan and reflection within a theoretical orientation toward reading instruction. The analysed plans showed a wide variance of instructional techniques even though each teacher used the same story. However, the variances were consistent with each teacher's articulated beliefs about reading literature instruction.

The findings of the studies reviewed up to this point indicate a positive relationship between teachers' beliefs of the reading process and their instructional practices. These findings are important in the sense that if theoretical orientations influence how teachers act during reading instruction, then teacher educators and people who work in professional development can affect classroom practice by assisting the development of theoretical orientations reflective of current research in the field.

The studies that follow have produced results that indicate disparity in the relationship between theoretical orientation and practice in the teaching and learning of reading. This does not necessarily mean that there is no connection, but perhaps other factors intervene in the theory-practice equation.

Readence, Konopak and Wilson (1991) (cited in Fang, 1996) indicated that as far as the pre-service and in-service secondary teachers are concerned, the relationship between beliefs and instructional practices varies from very consistent to very inconsistent. Although pre-service and in-service teachers hold similar theoretical orientations towards how reading takes place and develops, in-service teachers tend to be more inconsistent in their choice of instructional lessons. In addition, Davis, Konopak and Readence (1993), in their investigation on two chapter 1 teachers' beliefs about reading and instructional practices, found that although the teachers' reader-based beliefs were largely consistent with the choice of their hypothetical lesson plans, the relationship between their beliefs and the actual instructional practices lacked consistency. That gives credit to the Duffy and Anderson (1984) report, in which they claimed that despite the fact that there is some congruence between teachers' beliefs and practices about reading, the relationship is not altogether strong.

Duffy and Anderson (1984) found that although reading teachers were able to articulate their beliefs about reading outside the classroom, their actual instructional practices were governed by the nature of instruction and classroom life. Some

teachers, for example, base their instructional decisions on management and routine, thinking about the amount of assistance needed by low or high ability pupils, about the way pupils learn and about social/emotional characteristics.

Moreover, as Davis, Konopak and Readence (1993) noted, individual teacher's agendas, school ethos, resources and beliefs shaped the instructional task they faced every day. Specifically, they indicated that teachers' instructional decision-making was influenced by their environment where they have the opportunity to discover information, construct meaning and acquire the skills and strategies for themselves (Goodman, 1989a). On the other hand, there were teachers who believed in a much more direct approach to the teaching of basic skills through the medium of a structured programme (Stanovich, 1994). Moreover, other teachers believed in an eclectic programme containing key elements of a child-centred approach combined with explicit and direct teaching (Spiegel, 1992).

Kinzer (1988) investigated the belief systems of pre-service and in-service elementary reading teachers to discover whether experience affected consistency between teachers' beliefs and practices. He administered identical instruments to eighty-three pre-service and forty-four in-service teachers. The instruments consisted of two sets of fifteen statements designed to measure beliefs on how reading develops and how reading takes place. The participants chose between three sets of lesson plans to compare theoretical orientation with choice of instruction. Kinzer concluded that both groups with reader-based holistic explanations tended to

choose lessons reflective of their beliefs. On the contrary, those teachers with text-based interactive and differential acquisition explanation did not choose plans consistent with their beliefs. The focus of the study was on the effects that experience had on beliefs and it appeared that the inconsistency was due to unsure theoretical orientations not lack of experience.

Spidell, Rusher, McGrevin and Lambiotte's (1992) study of teachers' beliefs regarding developmentally appropriate and inappropriate practices, asked teachers to respond to a belief questionnaire and then an interview revealed how they perceived their classroom practices to be congruent with their beliefs. Results indicated that teachers were knowledgeable and in favour of developmentally appropriate practices, but felt that emphasis on direct skill development forced them to teach in an inappropriate manner.

Finally, Charlesworth, Hart, Burts, Thomasson, Mosely and Fleege (1993) conducted a follow-up to their 1991 study of kindergarten teachers' beliefs and practices related to developmentally appropriate guidelines. The study produced two instruments: a belief questionnaire and an observation checklist. The first was designed to identify teachers who appeared to be developmentally appropriate in their beliefs about classroom instruction. The second provided ratings of actual practices utilised in the classroom settings. Conclusions from the study revealed that teachers' expressed beliefs of developmentally appropriate practices were stronger than what was reflected in their classroom activities.

In summary, part of the literature on the belief–practice relationship in the teaching of reading has produced inconclusive findings regarding the extent and manner in which classroom practice is influenced by theoretical orientation. Findings seem to indicate that teachers’ literacy instructional decisions are influenced by multiple factors.

However, it is evident that teachers’ beliefs appear to be an integral part of classroom practice.

Teachers develop curriculum in various ways based on their ideas about the reading process and the specific contexts in which they teach. A complex relationship exists regarding the connection between theory and practice in the teaching and learning of reading due to the many factors that intervene in the instructional classroom decision-making process. A congruency between what teachers believe about how reading takes place and the practices they employ in the classroom in order to develop reading is, however, a dominant factor in the creation of an effective learning environment.

Fang (1996) argued that ‘although there is a growing body of research on teachers’ thought processes which continues to question whether or not teachers are able to provide instruction which is consistent with their theoretical beliefs, few have explicitly addressed a practically more important concern, that is, how teachers can apply their theoretical beliefs within the constraints imposed by the complexities of

classroom life'. (p.59) As Duffy and Anderson (1984) noted, 'the issue is not whether teachers should possess theoretical knowledge... they should. Instead the issue is how teachers can apply theoretical knowledge in real classrooms where the relationship between theory and practice is complex and where numerous constraints and pressures influence teacher thinking.' (p.103) (cited in Fang, 1996 (p.59))

For this reason the researcher of this study believes that teachers' views about teaching reading in early years crucially influence the kind of teaching the children receive. The study aims to investigate the following issues:

- What are teachers' views about the teaching of reading?
- How do these coincide with, or differ from, the theoretical models of teaching reading as derived from the literature?
- Do the experiences of reading that teachers offer to children in pre-school settings reflect their beliefs?

The next chapter will discuss the design of the study that was carried out to investigate these issues.

CHAPTER 3

DESIGN OF THE STUDY

3:1 The rationale

The aim of this study was to better understand the relationship between teachers' theoretical beliefs about reading and their instructional practices in the classroom. Having identified the key issues from the literature the next step was to turn those issues into research questions, which could be answered by the collection of data.

In this chapter an account of the methods and methodology of the research is provided, along with a discussion of the strengths and the weaknesses of the research strategy, design and methods. Simmons (2001) argued that 'at the outset of every research project it is essential to identify the most appropriate method of carrying out your study. The method you choose is likely to be determined by the time and budget available, as well as the subject matter of your research.' (p.87) Keeping in mind the particular characteristics of each study, the researcher, according to Holliday (2002), has to deal with the broader question of approach, as well as explain the procedures which would apply the principles set out on methodology to the practicalities of setting and structuring the process. Structuring the process, according to Anderson and Arsenaut (1998), means selecting a research design, defining a study population, developing data collection instruments, discussing the

limitations, forecasting ethical issues and finally projecting how the data was analysed.

Gillbert (1993) (cited in Silverman, 1998) suggested that if the aim is to explore people's wider perceptions, then qualitative methods might be favoured. However, at the same time, King, Keohane and Verba (1994) argued that 'most research does not fit clearly into one category or the other. The best often combines features of each.' (p.4)

The qualitative research community seeks an understanding of phenomena from multiple perspectives within a real world context. Denzin and Lincoln (1994) argued that 'qualitative research is multi-method in focus involving an interpretive, naturalistic approach to its subject matter. This means that qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or interpret phenomena in terms of, the meanings people bring to them. Qualitative research involves the studied use and collection of a variety of empirical materials – case study, personal experience, life story, interview, observational, historical, interactional and visual texts, that describe routine and problematic moments in individuals' lives.' (p.2)

Quantitative research, instead, has been characterised by Silverman (2001) as 'objective, abstract, fixed and in pursuit of measurable phenomena'. (p.27) Bryman (1988) has discussed five methods of quantitative research. 'Data can be collected

through social surveys, experiment, official statistics, structured observation and content analysis.’ (cited in Silverman, 2001 (p.27))

Before making any decisions about the methods, the researcher had to consider if the method finally chosen would provide adequate information, would be cost effective and feasible in terms of the sensitivities in the settings, and the resources available for the study.

Since the research questions of a study drive the chosen form of methodology, the fact that this study was about teachers’ beliefs and the extent to which these were operationalised in classroom settings indicated the appropriateness of a qualitative research design.

Maxwell (1998) argued that there are particular research purposes for which qualitative studies are especially useful. Specifically ‘understanding the meaning for participants in the study of events, situations and actions they are involved with, and the process by which events and actions take place. In a qualitative study the researcher is not only interested in the physical events and behaviour taking place, but also in how the participants in the study make sense of these and how their understanding influences their behaviour. The perspectives on events and actions held by the people involved in them are part of the reality that the researcher tries to understand.’ (p.75)

Other characteristics of qualitative methodology that gave strength to the decision to use this form of inquiry were:

- a) Part of the study was conducted in natural settings (schools) and the researcher's insights were used in the analysis.
- b) A large part of the data collected was descriptive.
- c) The researcher was concerned with the teaching of reading, which was regarded as an ongoing process driven by purpose and dependent on context.
- d) Data was analysed inductively as themes and patterns emerged.
- e) Using case studies could provide a contextual view of the factors that influence behaviour and thus help understand better the complexity of teachers' actions.

This qualitative study was built around three major methods of data collection: surveys, interviews and observations. The following sections describe the procedures that were used in the study. The procedures were flexible, as one characteristic of the naturalistic inquiry is that of 'emergent design'. (Lincoln and Guba, 1985) Researchers may start a project with some idea of what they want to do but a detailed set of procedures is not formed prior to data collection.

According to Pole and Lampard (2002), posing the question 'What counts as data?' served a number of purposes in the context of research design. 'It sensitised the researcher to the range of data which existed and encouraged him/her to think beyond the usual sources. It necessitated that attention be given to the relationship between method and substance. It required the researcher to think not only about

what data was required but also how it could be collected. It assisted the researcher in focusing the research by not only identifying what would count as relevant or appropriate data, but also by rejecting sources of data as inappropriate or because their use was not feasible within the constraints of the research project. Finally the researcher must think about the contribution to knowledge that his/her research would make. Without appropriate data it would not be possible to contribute to the key debates on the area.' (p.18) Having those suggestions in mind the next sections of this chapter aim at giving an account of the ways the researcher dealt with the issues presented above.

3:2 The research design

An overall plan of the study is presented and then followed by more detailed procedures and rationales for each phase of the study. Explanations and descriptions of such qualitative components as triangulation, validity and reliability are discussed within context as applicable.

Questionnaires

Pilot study: Twenty-one questionnaires were given to people who worked in early years settings around the area of the University of Warwick from June to August 2000.

Main study: One hundred and sixty questionnaires were distributed during November and December 2000 to the schools as well as to establishments offering children day care around the Coventry and Birmingham areas. In this particular case the aim of the survey was to explore how people who worked in early years settings thought that reading should be taught. Eighty-one questionnaires were completed and returned.

Interviews

Pilot study: Six teachers who worked in the area of Coventry, chosen at random, agreed to be interviewed during the summer of 2000. The interview had the form of a conversation. The interviewees were already informed about the nature and purpose of the study. They were given the opportunity to make any points they wished and an attempt to formulate the most effective questions was made on those grounds.

Main Study: Nine teachers who completed the questionnaire and worked in the areas around the University of Warwick and Coventry were interviewed from October to December 2000. Three teachers of each kind of setting (Private Day Nursery, Nursery Class attached to a Primary School, Reception Class) were chosen. The approach followed was a semi-structured interview and the duration of the interview was thirty-five to forty minutes.

Interviews were used in conjunction with other methods in order to validate them, or to go deeper into the motivations of the respondents and their reasons for responding the way they did.

Observations

Pilot study: Six settings were observed during June and July 2000. The settings were chosen at random and the only criterion that applied was easy access. The researcher stayed for a whole working day in the case of a Private Nursery and a whole session if it was a Nursery attached to a School or a Reception Class. In the settings that reading took place during the visit, as detailed notes as possible were taken about the following issues: a) Was the layout of the classroom facilitating reading? b) To what kind of reading activities were the children introduced? c) Were the books easily accessible to children? d) Were any of the activities that the children chose to spend time on (on their own incentive) related to reading?

Main Study: The people who were interviewed allowed the researcher to observe their settings/establishments for one day. As a result nine settings were observed during June and July 2000. Through a non-participant observation approach, the observations were used as illustrative case studies. Detailed descriptive data about what took place in the establishments was gathered and used to answer the initial questions about the class layout and the nature of the activities that the children were presented with.

3:3 Questionnaires

According to Kent (2001) 'providing an accurate picture of the attitudes and opinions people hold as a guide to their likely behaviour' (p.7) might be considered as one of the objectives of a survey. Researchers administer questionnaires to some sample of a population to learn about the distribution of characteristics, attitudes or beliefs. 'These surveys are called attitude surveys and their main aim is accurate description.' (Kent, 2001 (p.7))

In deciding to survey the group of people chosen for the study the researcher made, according to Marshall and Rossman (1995), one critical assumption: 'that the characteristic or belief could be described or measured accurately through self report. In using questionnaires the researcher relies totally on the honesty and the accuracy of participants' responses.' (p.96) Although this limits the usefulness of questionnaires in delving into tacit beliefs, Cohen and Manion (1994) argued that 'frequently the postal questionnaire is the best form of survey in an educational enquiry'. (p.94) On this basis a consideration of some necessary preliminaries to survey planning might limit, to some extent, the threat presented above. Cohen and Manion (1994) began with 'the specification of the exact nature of the enquiry, the population on which it was to focus, and the resources that were available'. (p.85)

Kent (2001) also argued that 'survey research involves bringing together three separate but interrelated roles: the client or principle on behalf of which the research

was undertaken, the researcher who undertook the research, and the respondent to whom questions or information-giving tasks were addressed. For the student projects the student often performed the role of both client and researcher.’ (pp.6-7)

A further important consideration, which was suggested by Simmons (2001) and was applicable in this study, was that ‘the researcher generally needs information about the research population in advance of the study in order to develop survey questions that are appropriate for the recipients’. (p.87) In this case the researcher was an early years practitioner herself, familiar with the ways in which the day was structured in the various settings as well as the documentation relating to teaching in the primary sector. Thus the researcher’s background provided all the elements of the exploratory research needed before developing the self-completion questionnaire.

In this particular case the aim of the survey was to explore how people who worked in early years settings thought that reading should be taught. Having decided upon the main objective of the study, Cohen and Manion (1994) argued that the second phase of planning involved ‘the identification and itemising of subsidiary topics that relate to its central purpose. That has to do with the formulation and identification of specific information requirements relating to each of the issues.’ (p.85)

The subsidiary topics included in the questionnaire used in this study, were teachers’ beliefs about reading, teachers’ beliefs about teaching reading, and teaching reading

in classroom practice. These three topics were addressed through nineteen questions divided into four sections. The content of the questionnaire was arranged in sections in order to increase clarity of structure and therefore maximise co-operation. The aim was to make the respondents aware of each section's content as soon as possible, hoping that it would make the completion of it easier and less time consuming. (A copy of the full questionnaire is given in Appendix 1.)

The first section (Questions 1-7) involved closed factual questions that, according to Filias (1994), were easy to think about and answer. Specifically Filias (1994) argued that 'closed questions are the perfect choice when simple answers are needed, as answers to questions which are aimed at grouping the respondents on the basis of a specific criterion'. (p.154)

Questions 1-6 were closed questions aimed at gaining an understanding of the characteristics of the population, and trying to check if the chosen sample was generally representative of the practitioners/teachers who worked in the early years sector.

Question 7, regarding how confident teachers felt to teach reading was, according to Sarandakos (1993), a primary one because it elicited information directly related to the research topic. But even though it was a closed question, easy to answer, and with increased chances of an honest response, the researcher had to keep in mind

that 'the respondent might give false information in order to display increased ability'. (Filiass, 1994 (p.152))

The next two questions (8 and 9) formed the second section of the questionnaire, which focussed on teachers' beliefs about reading. The content of the questions was based on the literature review. More specifically, through those two questions the main theoretical models about the teaching of reading were presented. Both of the questions were closed due to the fact that closed questions are regarded as quick to fill as well as easy to categorise and analyse. But at the same time Newman (1994) argued that 'a complete reliance on closed questions could distort the results'. (p.234)

Starting from Question 8, ranking scales were introduced. Simmons (2001) argued that 'a ranking scale can be valuable when trying to ascertain the level of importance of a number of items'. (p.93) Tuckman (1994) also argued that scales were devices constructed by researchers 'to quantify the responses of a subject on a particular variable. Scales might be used to obtain data concerning subjects' attitudes, judgements or perceptions about almost any topic or object.' (p.196)

Question 8 asked the respondents to rank in order of significance, the presented characteristics involved in the reading process. This question as well as the following one (Question 9) aimed at helping the researcher realise the teachers'

preference towards the main theoretical models of teaching reading, as well as the main skills involved.

Question 10, which formed the third section of the questionnaire, was a belief question. Respondents were presented with statements and asked to rank their agreement on a scale from 1-5, about a number of decision-making issues with regard to the teaching of reading.

Questions 13 and 14 were scale type questions inviting opinions from the respondents about factors that influence, and factors that change, teaching practice respectively. The scale choice for this research was the Likert scale. This scale was used to register the extent of agreement or disagreement with a particular statement of an attitude, belief or judgement. Floyd and Flower (1995) argued that 'the agree/disagree question form and its variants is one of the most used measurement strategies in survey research. When asking about ideas or policies it is an appropriate choice.' (p.67) But at the same time Floyd and Flower (1995) exercised caution when they argued that words in such questions should be 'as well defined as possible in order to increase consistency of respondent understanding of the ideas'. (p.65) They also suggested that items should present a single idea or question. This is because it offers more precise information about the respondents' degree of agreement or disagreement, as well as the opportunity to include items whose content is not obviously related to the belief in question, enabling deeper parameters

of the belief to be explored. For this reason the pattern of responses becomes more interesting than the total score.

Oppenheim (1992) also claimed that 'the chief function of attitude scaling is to divide people into a number of broad groups with respect to a particular attitude and to allow the researcher to study the ways in which such an attitude relates to other variables in the survey'. (p.187) A criticism levelled against this scale was that since it offers no metric or interval measure it is not possible to know where scores in the middle ranges change from mildly positive to mildly negative.

A possible way of dealing with the problem mentioned above was treating the Likert scale as 'an interval variable in which the interval between each point on the scale was assumed to be equal. It is actually called an equal appearing interval scale.' (Tuckman, 1994 (p.197)) And if it was also accepted that in practice equal score intervals did not permit to make assertions about underlying attitude differences, and that identical scores might have very different meanings then Likert scales could be regarded as ordinal variables since ordered categories did not have any intrinsic numeric qualities.

Weisberg, Krosnick and Bowen (1996) also argued that 'the options in ordinal variables do not have numeric properties because it would be unreasonable to assume that attitudinal differences between successive categories were the same. For example, the difference between strong and weak agreement to a statement might be

more or less than the difference between agreement and neutrality. Ordinal measurement was used in surveys when categoric responses were thought to be easier to obtain than numeric responses.’ (p.181)

On the other hand Questions 11, 12, and 15 to 17 were pre-coded fixed alternative questions. They addressed lesson planning issues, teaching reading techniques, and ways that may improve or deteriorate respectively, the quality of the reading lesson. The respondents were served with a set of answers and expected to choose the answer or answers with which they agreed more. The choice of those kinds of questions was based on the intention of the researcher to classify the responses, and the belief of the researcher that the respondents were teachers who had formed opinions and were well informed about the topic in discussion.

But Sarantakos (1993) argued that even though fixed alternative questions were easy to administer and code there were limitations that must be taken into consideration. Sarantakos (1993) namely suggested ‘difficulty in covering all the possible answers, restriction of freedom, creativity and expressiveness of the respondent and a high chance of guessing the answers’. (p.165)

Finally, Question 18 was the only open-ended question and asked the respondents to describe a reading activity. The rationale behind it was to benefit from the advantages that open-ended questions have to offer. Open-ended questions are used, according to Stacey (1982) (p.80) (cited in Simmons, 2001), ‘where the issue is

complex, where relevant dimensions are not known and where a process is being explored'. (p.94) In this case, the open-ended question allowed freedom to the respondents to express their thoughts and justify their opinion. They offered information about areas regarding the teaching of reading that might not have been foreseen by the researcher and allowed assumptions about the respondent's way of thinking and logic.

In addition, this question was a way of gaining a first impression about the kind of data that would be generated through the interviews that followed. Only one open-ended question was used because of the disadvantages involved. Specifically, Becker (1989) (cited in Sarantakos, 1993) argued that open-ended questions produced a 'large amount of information, which required time and effort to evaluate, they were time consuming and the responses are difficult to justify. Finally, open-ended questions could offer useless or irrelevant information.' (p.165)

Further discussion of the ways that problems deriving from the use of open-ended questions were handled is presented in the interview section.

The sample of the study

The population used in a questionnaire is the group about which the researcher is interested in gaining information and drawing conclusions. The sampling process, according to Tuckman (1994), helped 'establishing boundary conditions that specify who would be included in or excluded from the population. Thus sampling had to do

with the definition of the population.’ (p.238) The selection of the sample was done by referring to the variables of interest and by taking into account practical considerations.

The sampling process might affect the nature of the conclusions that might be drawn from the study. If the population is broadly defined, then external validity or generalisability could be maximised, although the use of a broad definition might make obtaining a representative sample difficult, and might require a large sample size.

Conversely, ‘defining a population narrowly might facilitate the selection of a suitable sample, but it would restrict conclusions and generalisations to the specific population used, which may be inconsistent with the intent of the study’. (Tuckman, 1994 (p.238)) But at the same time May (1997) argued that the size of the sample is not necessarily the most important consideration. What the researcher needs to focus on is that the sample characteristics are similar to those of the population. Fink (1995) also argued that no matter how hard someone tried for an accurate sample, ‘sampling bias or error is inevitable’. (p.25) He suggested that error might arise from sampling sources, including lack of precision in the study definition of the target population, as well as errors in survey design and measurement. In addition, definitions of exclusion or inclusion criteria, selection processes, and non-response were regarded as causes of sampling error.

The nature of this research allowed the use of a stratified random sample. 'In stratified random sampling, the population was subdivided into two or more exclusive segments called strata, based on categories of one, or a combination of, relevant variables.' (Singleton and Straits, 1999 (pp.149-150)) Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2000) also suggested that 'organising a stratified sample was a simple two-stage process. Firstly, the characteristics that had to appear in the sample should be identified. Secondly, randomly sample within those groups, the size of which being determined by the judgement of the researcher.' (p.101) The fact that for this study the sample was homogenous – all of them were, or acted like, teachers – facilitated stratification. The sample was divided into three manageable groups based on where the participants worked (Private Day Nurseries, Nurseries attached to Primary Schools and Reception Classes) and then random sampling was taken from each group.

Weisberg, Krosnick and Bowen (1996) also argued that 'stratification guaranteed matching some population proportions to safeguard accuracy' (p.48), and went on to specify that 'stratifying is especially useful in increasing accuracy when two groups differ widely on the topic being studied, yet members within each group are very similar' (pp.45-46), something that particularly applies in this study.

One hundred and sixty questionnaires were distributed between November and December 2000 to the schools as well as to the establishments offering children day care, around the area of Coventry, the nearest town to the University of Warwick.

Validity and reliability

In quantitative research, reliability refers to the extent that an instrument will yield the same results each time it is administered. Validity on the other hand, refers to 'the extent of "matching congruence" or "goodness of fit" between an operational definition and the concept it is purported to measure'. (Singleton and Straits, 1999 (p.115)) In other words, validity measures the extent to which the instrument measures what it is intended to measure. As for the introductory questions in this questionnaire, 'face validity refers simply to a personal judgement that an operational definition appears on the face of it to measure the concept it is intended to measure. In some cases this claim alone would seem reasonable to establish a measure's validity. Few would dispute the face validity of common indicators of variables such as age, gender and education.' (Singleton and Straits, 1999 (p.121))

In this case, the survey was used as a research tool in order to explore attitudes or beliefs. On this basis 'content validity concerns the extent to which a measure adequately represents all the facets of a concept'. (Singleton and Straits, 1999 (p.121)) In this study, the researcher was interested in the content or meaning of attitudes or beliefs and their usefulness as an indicator of a specific behaviour. In an attempt to enhance validity, the questionnaire was divided into sections that included sets of questions. Each set was aimed at addressing a different facet of the same concept (teachers' beliefs about reading). What the researcher wanted was 'to create valid and reliable operational definitions for variables for which the researcher wanted to investigate the interrelationships'. (Black, 1999 (p.216)) Therefore the

researcher's hypotheses 'could be operationalised into measures. This meant that hypotheses must turn into questions that respondents would understand and answer. That way the researcher could be able to categorise and quantify the responses.'

(May, 1997 (p.84))

Black (1999) argued that the 'design of written instruments requires a degree of planning, elaborating on the attitude, value, belief or feeling (concept) that is to be measured through the process of devising a table of constructs. Writing statements of general observable indicators of these (constructs) before attempting to write an actual set of questions (operational definitions) will help to ensure the validity of the final instrument.' (p.225) But according to Pole and Lampard (2002), assessing any form of validity 'involves a degree of subjectivity'. In content validity, for example, Pole and Lampard (2002) posed the question of how many observable indicators cover the breath of a concept. They concluded by suggesting that this can be answered only 'in relation to the research objectives and the confidence the researcher has on the indicators'. (pp.101-102)

In this case the literature review chapter combined with the researcher's intentions to discuss the practices followed by the participants in the teaching of reading were used as a framework for the choice of indicators.

Thus a second attempt to enhance validity was to remove as much bias from the research process as possible and produce results that were replicable by following

the same methods. This could be achieved, according to McMiller and Wilson (1984), through standardisation. This has to do with the description of the conditions under which a survey was conducted, how a questionnaire was designed, administered and analysed. If the researcher was able to address all these issues s/he would be able to show not only 'if what has been measured is valid or invalid,' but also, 'the use to which the measure is put'. (De Vaus, 1991 (p.54-55)) The aim of this chapter was to describe the procedures mentioned above in detail.

With regard to reliability, Mehrens and Lehman (1984) argued that 'one of the ways to measure reliability is to conduct a split half test. This is recommended when attitude questionnaires using scales such as rating and Likert are used.' (cited in Black, 1999 (p.275))

Mehrens and Lehman (1984) (cited in Black, 1999) also claimed that 'the process is based on the division of the questionnaire into two equivalent halves. Each question had a matching partner that essentially asked the same thing in different words. The corresponding form of reliability determines how consistently the subjects tend to answer the pairs of questions.' (p.278) In this particular case this reliability test could not be chosen due to the fact that pairs of questions were not offered. Instead, the approach followed was the one suggested by Simmons (2001) who argued that one definition of reliability is concerned with the stability of an instrument over time. 'Stability is usually measured by administering the same instrument twice to

the same respondents, the time interval being chosen so as to minimise the likelihood that “real” change may have taken place.’ (p.116)

Test-retest reliability intended to find out if the instrument provided much the same score on two different occasions. Thus a simple approach to test this was to administer the instrument to the same group on two separate occasions.

Six MA students at the University of Warwick agreed to fill in the questionnaire twice, with a day’s gap in-between, during the summer of 2000. All six respondents gave the same answers on both occasions.

Perhaps an additional means of increasing validity and reliability is the pilot study process.

Pilot study

‘A pilot study was a small-scale study conducted prior to the actual research. It was conducted in order to test the procedures and techniques to see that they worked satisfactorily. In addition, pilot studies were used to test questionnaires and other instruments to see if there was any possibility that valuable results can be found. In the case that promising results did not appear in the pilot study, researchers reconsider the rational design, or validity of their study. Thus pilot studies provided an excellent way of avoiding trivial or non-significant research.’ (Anderson, 1998 (pp.11-12))

Twenty-one questionnaires were given to people who worked in early years settings around the area of the University of Warwick from June to August 2000. A list of schools was obtained from the Coventry Education Service as well as a list of establishments of childcare, and those closest to the researcher's base were contacted via telephone. The purpose and nature of the study was explained and a visit was requested. When the researcher visited the settings, she explained that in the current stage of the research, their feedback was more important than the actual completion of the questionnaire. All the teachers who agreed to the visit at their school completed the questionnaire while the researcher was there. Additionally, a discussion took place with these teachers about it. This took place either during their lunch break or after the children had gone home, and lasted half an hour to forty minutes. The researcher experienced no resistance from the teachers about visiting their schools or providing the information needed. The schools that were used for the pilot study were excluded from the main part of the research, which took place during winter 2000.

Every effort had been made to minimise to the greatest possible extent, any problems regarding the questions through the repeated attempts for clarity of wording and simplicity of the questionnaire design, even before the pilot study process. That way the researcher tried to achieve precision of content and coherence of structure to the greatest possible extent.

Bell (1987) argued that there are rules with regards to content, wording and layout of a questionnaire. 'The focus and the content of the questionnaire have to be right, the wording suitable and the context sequence and response categories, if any, must help the respondents without unintentionally biasing the sample.' (Oppenheim, 1992 (p.121)) The feedback received from the teachers as well as from a former British MA student helped towards this direction.

The aim was to make the questionnaire more effective by ensuring that the respondents interpreted the questions in the way the researcher wanted them to.

The process resulted in the following comments made by people working with children in the age range of three to five.

- The majority of the people who participated and worked in Private Nurseries did not perceive themselves as teachers, due to the fact that they did not hold a teaching qualification. Instead they perceived themselves as child carers. When the researcher mentioned that they were working with three and four year olds and were acting like teachers, they agreed and had no problem in completing the questionnaire as long as they were not regarded as teachers. Specifically one of them wrote, 'As a nursery nurse this is my own view of teaching reading, not from a teacher's point of view'.
- All participants, regardless of setting, talked about Early Learning Goals (QCA 1999) instead of the National Curriculum (DfES 2000) as their framework for teaching. Those who worked in Private Day Nurseries found the question regarding

the National Curriculum (DfES 2000) not applicable and did not answer. Those who decided to answer did so by referring to Early Learning Goals (QCA 1999).

- Those who worked in Private Day Nurseries claimed that they did not work in a class.
- Question 12 asked the respondents to express in percentages how long during a lesson the children: a) Work individually, b) Work in groups, and c) Work as a whole class. Participants answered the questions but commented that they found it difficult to express themselves in percentages.
- The majority did not rank in order of significance the sources of difficulty in the teaching of reading offered in relevant questions.
- The majority also did not rank in order of significance the ways of improving the teaching of reading offered in relevant questions. In both cases they claimed that all options were too important.
- Two people who worked in a private pre-school setting refused to complete the questionnaire due to the fact that they worked with seven to nine-month-old babies.
- In one setting they argued that they did not teach language. What they taught was the alphabet and letter recognition. In this specific setting they argued that some of the questions might be more relevant to teaching in Primary School.
- Most of them asked what offering children's literature as a way of teaching reading meant.
- The respondents added a number of qualifications.
- Twelve out of twenty respondents did not answer the last question, which asked them to describe one reading activity that exemplifies their approach to the teaching

of reading. This was either due to lack of time or their uncertainty as to which activity would reflect their beliefs most clearly.

- The majority of the respondents related their answers directly to their practice. They had difficulty in accepting that there might be a difference between the two. Also if they did not work with the relevant age group, in this case three to five-year-olds, they felt that it was inappropriate for them to answer the questions.

Finally the results of the pilot study prompted the researcher to make the following assumption: the pre-service training and the years of experience that a person had critically influenced the approach s/he chose to follow in the teaching of reading.

On the basis of the comments presented above the following alterations were made to the questionnaire:

- The qualifications suggested were added.
- Question 6 was amended to ask for the size of the group for whom they were responsible rather than the size of the class.
- The question relating to the National Curriculum (DfES 2000) was rephrased so as to refer to Early Learning Goals (QCA 1999).
- The questions that asked respondents to rank in order of significance the sources of difficulty in teaching reading and the ways of improving teaching reading were altered to allow each applicable item to be ticked in each case.

- Question 12 was changed to: In a typical one hour's literacy lesson how long do the children a) Work individually, b) Work in groups, and c) Work as a whole class?

This negated the use of percentages in the answers.

- The option 'I rarely change my practice' was omitted from Question 14.

- Despite the poor result it was decided to keep the single open-ended question for validity reasons.

Coding

Most questionnaires were pre-coded to allow the classification of the responses into analytical and meaningful categories. The coding process was, according to Ross and Sullivan (1996), 'the first step in preparing data for computer analysis. It constitutes the first step in mapping out observations into data.' (p.38) Even if coding made the questionnaire easier to analyse, careful pilot work was required so the answers should fulfil two criteria, according to May (1997), they should be 'mutually exclusive. This had to do with the inability of an answer to fall into more than one category. They should also be exhaustive. This had to do with the ability of the researcher to encompass every question under the categories chosen.' (p.96)

Singleton and Straits (1999) argued that coding for computer analysis 'consisted of assigning numbers or symbols to variable categories. For close-ended questions coding was straightforward. There are relatively few categories and all that is needed is to assign a different code to each category.' (p.457)

In this case a number had been given to each questionnaire so the researcher could know from which school the questionnaire came. The respondents were also presented with statements. Each statement was regarded as a variable and it had been coded with a letter of the alphabet or with a combination of alphabet letters.

But at the same time, Singleton and Straits (1999) suggested caution when they argued that ‘the tendency for novice researchers is to use too few categories which gloss over potentially meaningful differences. Once the data was coded and data analysis was underway it was easy to combine categories for purposes of analysis but it is impossible to recover lost detail.’ (pp.457-459) In this case the small scale of the research prevented the researcher from facing the threat presented above.

As for the open-ended questions, Singleton and Straits (1999) claimed that ‘the researcher tried to develop a coding scheme that did not require a separate code for every respondent but adequately reflected the full range of responses. The idea was to put the data in manageable form while retaining as much information as practical.’ (p.457)

Since there was only one open-ended question the development of coding involved interplay between theory and data. It represented a balance between too much and too little detail. All the responses were transcribed, coded and subsequently categorised on the basis of their relevance to suggestions included in the Curriculum Guidance for the Foundation Stage (QCA 2000), which were used as headings.

Non-response

Black (1999) argued that ‘in order to justify external validity there would be a need to counter criticism of non-responses by providing evidence that any non-response had nothing to do with the research or the instruments’. (p.136) Pole and Lambard (2002) also argued that ‘the negative effects of non-response depend both on its magnitude and on the extent to which non-respondents are distinctive. Thus the response rate of a survey is only a crude guide to the likely level of bias in its findings.’ (p.65)

In order to convince the respondents to participate, the researcher sent an introductory letter with the questionnaire, in which she described the purpose of the research, and assured the respondents that the data collected would be used in confidence and only for the purpose of the research.

In addition, one hundred questionnaires were sent as a follow-up attempt within January and February 2000 in order to increase the response rate. As a result five more questionnaires were completed and returned. Consequently the number of questionnaires used for this study was eighty-six (eighty-one plus five).

3:4 Interviews

The reason why a semi-structured interview approach was chosen

According to Anderson (1998) an interview is defined as ‘a specialised form of communication between people for a specific purpose associated with some agreed subject matter. Thus, the interview is a highly purposeful task which goes beyond mere conversation.’ (p.190) The purpose of this interview was to discuss in depth the practitioners’ beliefs about the teaching of reading.

Provided that the general principle is that ‘research strategy and the methods or techniques employed must be appropriate to the questions you want to answer’ (Robson, 1993 (p.38)), Tuckman (1994) argued that as ‘a distinctive research technique, interview might be used as the principle means of gathering information by providing access to what is inside a person’s head. Through interview it is possible to measure what a person thinks (i.e. attitudes and beliefs).’ (p.216) Kerlinger (1969) also suggested that interview might be used ‘in conjunction with other methods in order to validate them, or to go deeper into the motivations of the respondents and their reasons for responding the way they did’. (cited in Cohen and Manion, 1994 (p.273))

That was the aim behind the choice of the interview as a research method. The researcher aimed at comparing the responses given in the questionnaires with the interviewees’ answers. In this way the researcher attempted to respond to the

criticism made by Yin (1994) who claimed that surveys emphasise verbal information but not the measurement or recording of actual behaviour.

Robson (1993) argued that 'being in a middle ground, a semi-structured interview has defined purposes, but offers to the researcher the flexibility to modify the wording and the order of questions, based upon his/her perception of what seems most appropriate in the context of the conversation'. (p.231)

In this case the interviewees were asked their personal opinion. Interviewing provided recent and complete information, since the interviewer could clarify and probe the answers of the respondents. Informality and honesty might provide interesting information if they could be achieved. The researcher, according to Padgett (1998), wished to 'capture the experience from the perspective of those who lived in it and create meaning from it'. (p.8)

Sampling process

'There are no rules for sample size in qualitative inquiry. Sample size depends on what the researcher wants to know, the purpose of the inquiry, what will be useful, what will have credibility, and what will be done with the available time and resources.' (Patton, 1990 (p.184))

Sampling in qualitative research, according to Padgett (1998), aimed at flexibility and depth. Although access and availability were key criteria in the sampling choice,

convenience alone should not lead to decisions in a study. Once again the use of a stratified random sample was chosen. Singleton and Straits (1999) argued that 'obtaining a stratified sample necessitates classifying cases according to categories of the stratifying variable, which the researcher has to know prior to drawing the sample. Otherwise the researcher cannot draw separate samples from each stratum.' (pp.151-152) In this case the sample was homogenous, all teachers, something that reduced variation, simplified analysis, and facilitated comparisons.

Weisberg, Krosnick, and Bowen (1996) also argued that the use of a stratified random sample permitted the inclusion of parameters of special interest. In this case the parameter of special interest was the educational background or pre-service training that participants had relative to early years practice.

Taking this into account the sample may be characterised as purposive. Patton (1990) argued that 'purposive samples should be judged on the basis of the purpose and rationale of each study and the sampling strategy used to achieve the study's purpose. The sample, like all other aspects of qualitative inquiry, must be judged in context.' (p.185)

Maxwell (1998) also argued that 'purposeful sampling can be used to establish particular comparisons and to illuminate the reasons for differences between settings or individuals'. (p.88)

Every effort has to be made to ensure the participants have a variety of educational backgrounds. But at the same time, Weisberg, Krosnick and Bowen (1996) argued that 'purposive sampling often works well, but it is hard to prove that the researcher has sampled appropriately'. (p.40)

Guba and Lincoln (1985) also argued that in purposive sampling 'the size of the sample is determined by informational considerations. If the purpose is to maximise information, the sampling is terminated when no new information is forthcoming from new sample units. Thus redundancy is the primary criterion, and the question of sample size is open.' (p.202)

Nine teachers who worked in the area around the University of Warwick were interviewed from October to December 2000. In order to maximise the benefits of purposive sampling, three teachers of each kind of setting (Private Day Nursery, Nursery Class attached to Primary School, Reception Class) were chosen. The approach followed was the semi-structured interview and the duration of each interview was thirty-five to forty minutes.

Pilot study

Six teachers who worked in the area of Coventry, chosen completely at random, agreed to be interviewed during the summer of 2000. The interview took place in the establishment in which they worked at a time of their convenience, mostly after the teaching hours were over.

The criteria for the choice of the pilot study participants were convenience and access. The aim behind the pilot study was to refine the data collection plan in response to the content of the data and the procedures to be followed. In this case the researcher hoped to clarify the lines of questioning and perhaps to achieve further insights into the basic issues being studied. The pilot study was used in parallel with an ongoing review of the relevant literature so that the final research design was informed both by prevailing theories and by a fresh set of empirical observations.

The interview took the form of a conversation. The researcher had already in a previous short meeting informed the teachers about the nature and purpose of the study. Thus at the beginning participants had the opportunity to make any points they wished and on those grounds the researcher tried to formulate the most effective questions.

One of the most important issues in designing a qualitative study, according to Maxwell (1998), was how much you should attempt to pre-structure your methods. 'Structured approaches could help the comparability of data across sources and are thus particularly useful in answering variance questions that deal with differences between things and the explanations for these differences. Unstructured approaches, in contrast, could help to focus on the phenomena studied. They trade generalisability and comparability for internal validity and contextual understanding.' (p.85)

But Miles and Huberman (1994) argued that ‘if you are new to qualitative studies and are looking at a better-understood phenomenon within a familiar culture, a loose inductive design is a waste of time’. (p.17) They also argued that pre-structuring procedures reduce the amount of data that you have to deal with, functioning as a form of pre-analysis that simplifies the analytic work required.

Taking this into account, the researcher had written a small list of questions. The list was not shown to the practitioners; instead the researcher used the questions as guidelines whenever it was possible. The prepared questions were as follows:

- a) What are the aims of this lesson with regards to reading?
- b) Give me some indicators suggesting that the lesson went well.
- c) What are the reading aims in this term?
- d) When a child finishes Nursery/Reception Class how fluent should s/he be in terms of reading?
- e) How do you assess children’s progress in terms of reading?
- f) Do you follow a specific routine with regards to your teaching of reading?

The conversations were taped and then transcribed. The patterns that emerged are detailed below. (A full transcript of an interview is given in Appendix 2.)

Practitioners who worked at Private Day Nurseries and Nursery Classes attached to Primary Schools were eager to make absolutely clear the fact that they were neither

teachers nor felt able to teach reading. What they did was to work on play-based activities aiming at supporting literacy development. They then described a day's routine as well as the kind of activities they used which they felt could be linked to the researcher's work. They talked about what they were obligated to do on the basis of Early Learning Goals (QCA 1999) and they gave their opinion about the effectiveness of the document in practice.

Nobody talked about specific aims with regards to reading and they also rejected the idea of following a specific routine with regard to the teaching of reading. Instead they emphasised the three most influential factors of their teaching:

- a) their work on the social and emotional development of the children,
- b) their close co-operation with the children's parents and guardians, and
- c) their close co-operation with the schools that the children were to go to when they finished Nursery School.

On the other hand, Reception Class teachers were very clear, stating that there was structure in their day as well as in the activities they presented to the children with regard to reading. They mentioned specific aims in the form of attainment targets and they also spoke about Baseline Assessment even though they either had reservations on the issue or they were against the idea. Finally they shared their opinions about how they themselves would like reading to be introduced to the children.

In an attempt to enhance clarity of concepts and validity, in two cases the researcher had a second meeting with the practitioners in order for them to read parts of the transcribed data and have a further brief talk about their views.

A second attempt to increase validity was to ask two of the researcher's fellow students to read part of the transcripts in order to find out to what extent they agreed about the patterns that emerged from the data.

This kind of interview provided a framework within which the actual questions could be developed and put in sequence. Decisions were also made about which information to pursue in greater depth.

In the light of the data gathered the researcher decided that part of the information given from practitioners who worked at Private Day Nurseries and Nursery Classes offered an understanding of the nature of their work, but could not be directly linked to the research questions. However, Maxwell (1998) commented that 'the research question identifies things that the researcher wants to understand. The interview questions generate the data that is needed to understand these things.' (p.83) Thus the researcher decided to use a set of generic questions and use probes to pursue further whenever it was possible. The variety of responses given made the researcher follow the semi-structured interview approach.

Structuring the interview

As suggested by Robson (1993), 'a semi-structured interview is likely to include the following:

- introductory comments;
- a list of topic headings and possibly key issues to ask under these headings;
- a set of associated prompts;
- closing comments'. (p.238)

As Cohen and Manion (1994) suggested, the goal of the research was translated into more detailed and specific questions.

Anderson (1998) argued that effective interviewing 'relies on sound planning. The interviewer needs to control the content and the process of the interview as well. The content is controlled by the protocol, and by the nature of the questions.' (p.194) Having the questionnaire and the literature review reading as background information about the topic, the following six generic questions were used in this case:

1. What should the child be able to deal with by the end of his/her year in the setting with regards to reading?
2. What would you as a teacher be happy for the child to know in terms of reading by the end of his/her year in the setting?
3. Do you follow a certain routine every day in teaching reading?

4. How do you assess his/her progress?
5. Has your pre-service training made you capable of teaching reading to children of this age?
6. Give me your opinion about the Curriculum Guidance for the Foundation Stage (QCA 2000).

With Question 1, the researcher aimed to find out what the teacher felt obligated to teach to the child.

Question 2 aimed to find out if what the teacher actually taught was in accordance with what s/he would like to teach.

Question 3 was focused on the kind of activities through which children were introduced to reading.

Question 4 aimed at discussing assessment processes in reading (i.e. opinions about Baseline Assessment as well as aspects of classroom management/ability groups).

Question 5 was to find out if the difference in pre-service training had anything to do with the approach that teachers chose to teach reading.

Question 6 was aimed at finding the first impressions that the new Government document about early years had created in the practitioners.

The first step towards a good interview is to have clear objectives. The second one is for the researcher to have good process skills. Patton (1990) argued that 'the structure of an interview is based on the passing of messages from one party to the other'. The researcher initially intended to use the six generic questions presented above as an 'interview guide', a list of issues that are to be explored in the course of the interview. Thus the interviewer would have remained free to build the conversation on a particular subject area (i.e. the teaching of reading), to 'word the questions spontaneously, and to establish a conversational style with the focus being on a particular subject that has been predetermined'. (p.283)

The researcher as an instrument of data collection

Validity and reliability of qualitative data depend to a great extent on the methodological skill, sensitivity and integrity of the researcher. Skilful interviewing involved much more than just asking the questions. Patton (1999) argued that 'generating useful and credible qualitative data requires discipline, knowledge, training, practice, creativity and hard work'. (p.140)

Cohen and Manion (1994) also argued that the most practical way of achieving greater validity with regards to interviewing is minimising bias. 'Sources of bias may include the characteristics of the interviewer, the characteristics of the respondent, as well as the content of the questions. With regard to the interviewer, sources of bias may be considered as a tendency to seek answers that support

preconceived notions or misconceptions about what the interviewee is saying.’
(pp.281-282)

In addition, the subjectivity of the researcher himself/herself has to be taken into account. The researcher’s own insights could help them to gain an understanding of the phenomena they study. At the same time the researcher has to develop strategies in order to avoid bias during the interpretation of the findings. Effective communication is also affected by expertise. Perhaps the most important prerequisite was one’s facility to use the language. Anderson (1998) argued that much distortion could occur when messages are communicated verbally (p.194).

Another issue that the interviewer has to take into consideration is that his/her behaviour might influence the attitude of the respondent and as a result, the quality of information coming from the interaction between the participants. It is important to attend and listen attentively to the respondent. ‘By utilising attending behaviour to enhance individuals’ self-respect and to establish a secure atmosphere, the interviewer facilitates free expression thereby enhancing validity.’ (Anderson, 1998 (p.195))

But at the same time Kitwood (1977) (cited in Cohen and Manion, 1994) argued that ‘where increased reliability is brought about by greater control of its elements, this is achieved at the cost of reduced validity. The more the interviewer becomes rational,

calculated and detached, the less likely the interview is to be perceived as a friendly transaction and the more calculated the response is likely to be.' (p.282)

Permission, duration and location of the interview

Interviews were held three times a week in the setting at a time that was convenient to the person who worked with the children. Permission and time arrangements were made via telephone. The researcher had to explain the purpose of the research and the topic of interest. The prospective interviewees were informed that the duration of the interview would be half an hour. The researcher found almost no resistance in visiting the settings and conducting the interviews. Only in two cases did the teachers say that they did not have time, and in another two the researcher was asked to put what she wanted in writing.

Doing the interview

Before the questions were posed a brief meeting was held with the head or the manager in the presence of the teacher, where the researcher had to explain who she was and to talk about the topic of the research. Then after going to the place where the interview was to take place the researcher had to guarantee confidentiality and anonymity in every case. Most of the teachers asked to be informed about the content of the interview. It was made clear to them that what the researcher wanted was their opinion on how they think reading should be taught to children aged three to five.

When the researcher was allowed to visit the schools and conduct the actual interviews, she was given time either in-between classes or during teachers' lunch breaks. Teachers told the researcher to be quick, so instead of conducting a short informal discussion as was initially planned, the researcher decided to transform the headings written into questions and focus on them.

Due to the circumstances, the interviews had been partly transformed from semi-structured to what Patton (1990) called a standardised open-ended interview.

The basic purpose of the standardised open-ended interview is to minimise the interviewer effects by asking the same question to each respondent. Moreover, the interview is systematic and the necessity for the interviewer's judgement during the interview is reduced. The standardised open-ended interview also makes analysis easier because it is possible to locate each respondent's answer to the same question quickly and to organise questions and answers that are similar.

Patton (1990) argued that there are major reasons for using standardised open-ended interviews. Firstly, 'the questions used in the interview are available for inspection by decision-makers. Secondly, the interview is focused so the interviewee's time is carefully used.' (p.285)

In this case, whenever the researcher could, she asked one or two further questions when it was thought that the information given was of interest. This change in the

course of research imposed by the situation was in the long run beneficial to the study. The reason was that the time left to the researcher to talk was short and that misunderstandings between the participants were avoided. In some cases two people were interviewed at the same time (e.g. owner and manager of a Private Day Nursery). In such cases the interview took the form of a discussion between them and the interviewer only posed the questions when the timing was right.

On these occasions the interviews were tape-recorded and after the interview the researcher wrote as detailed notes as possible about the context in which the interview was held. Transcribing was necessary in this study because it helped to organise the data when it was analysed. In addition, according to Macmillan and Schumacher (1989), 'transcripts, direct quotes from documents, and concrete precise description of field notes, are the most common methods of establishing internal validity in qualitative research'. (p.192)

But due to the fact that it was a very time consuming process it was carried out by a trained transcription secretary.

Reliability and validity

The reliability of interview schedules can be achieved, according to Silverman (2001), through a number of means, including:

- thorough pre-testing of the interview schedules;
- thorough training of the interviewers;

- as much use as possible of fixed-choice answers, and
- inter-rater reliability checks on the coding of answers to open-ended questions.

Interviews must also satisfy the criterion of using low inference descriptions. This could be achieved through:

- tape-recording all face-to-face interviews;
- carefully transcribing the tapes according to the needs of reliable analysis, and
- presenting long extracts of data in the research report. (pp.229-230)

In this case the pilot study was used as a basis to adjust and then test the effectiveness of the interview schedules. The researcher had also received theoretical training with regards to interviewing and closely followed the interview guide in order to minimise any weaknesses due to lack of practical experience. Moreover, fixed-choice answers were not offered. With regard to reliability checks in terms of coding, the interview guide formed the categories and the differences in the training and workplace of the interviewees made the classification easy.

Despite that fact, two MA students were asked by the researcher to read different parts of the transcripts. Then they were introduced to the code used by the researcher and were asked to code the responses themselves. The aim was to find to what extent the choices were similar.

In order to satisfy the criterion of using low-inference description, the researcher followed the suggestions made by Silverman (2001) and tape-recorded the interviews and presented long extracts of data in the chapter in which the findings are presented. Finally, although Silverman (2001) disagreed with the use of a professional audio typist for the transcription of tapes, time restrictions made the researcher decide to ask for the help of a professional audio typist.

The choice in terms of validity was what Silverman (2001) called 'constant comparative method'. This involves simply inspecting and comparing all the data fragments that arise in a single case (p.239). The small number of interviews helped the researcher face the practical difficulties of assembling all the data in an analysable form. At the same time, the fact that the categories were largely self-explanatory facilitated the comparison. The researcher started out with a small part of the data and then having generated a set of categories, steadily expanded the body of the data. The fact that all the interviews were transcribed helped to achieve variation of opinion.

Another way used to achieve validation of the research findings was what Silverman (2001) called 'respondent validation'. In other words, two out of the nine interviewees agreed to read their interviews and comment on them if they wished. Such a process of validation should, according to Bloor (1983) (p.43) (cited in Silverman, 2001), 'be treated as another source of data and insight'. (p.236)

3:5 Observations

The reason why observation was chosen

Patton (1990) presented the benefits of observation as a technique and argued that direct observation could offer the researcher an understanding of the context in which the activity takes place, something that is essential for a holistic approach. First-hand experience also allowed the researcher to be open and discovery-oriented. By being in the field, the researcher had less need to rely on prior conceptualisations of the phenomenon.

In addition, the researcher was able to notice things that may routinely escape conscious awareness among the people who worked in the setting. Moreover, direct observations allowed the researcher to collect information about things that interviewees were perhaps unwilling to talk about. Furthermore, observations allowed the researcher to go beyond the selective perceptions of others. Interviews presented the understandings of the people being interviewed. Those understandings constituted important information. However, it was necessary for the researcher to know that interviews involve selective perceptions.

Through observation, the researcher himself/herself has selective perceptions. Adding his/her own perceptions to the data available probably meant s/he was more able to give a comprehensive view of the situation under study. S/he might also use

his/her experience as an aid to better understand and interpret the situation under study.

Patton (1999) claimed that the purpose of the observational analysis was to take the reader into the setting that was observed. The observational data had depth and detail. The data should be sufficiently descriptive for the reader to understand what occurred and what did not. The basic criterion to apply to a recorded observation was the extent to which the observation permitted the reader to enter the situation under study. This method for gathering qualitative data forces a discussion on the role or stance of the researcher.

Evertson and Green (1986) argued that ‘differing purposes could lead to differences in strategies for observation, levels of systematisation and levels of formality. These factors could lead to differences in design and implementation. In addition, the purpose of an observation is related to the theory, beliefs and assumptions of the person who observed. These factors formed the frame of reference of the observer and influenced the decision-making as well as the observational process.’ (p.163)

The goal in this case was not to produce standardised careful results that any other researcher studying the same issues might have produced. Instead it was to produce a coherent description of a situation that was based on a detailed study of that situation.

The observer's stance

A major concern about the validity and reliability of observational data concerned the effects of the observer on what was observed. The basic notion was that people might behave quite differently when they know that they are being observed compared with how they would act if they were not aware of it. Thus the argument goes that 'covert observations' (Patton, 1990) are more likely to capture what is really happening.

Due to the fact that the observations took place in Nursery and Reception Classes, it was not possible for the children to understand what was actually happening. What the researcher did instead was to inform the teacher of the nature of the observation.

Even though the researcher had informed consent from the teachers it had to be considered that her presence might have an influence on their decisions on the particular day. But it can be argued that there were reasons that allowed hoping for the opposite. Firstly, the fact that the teachers with whom the researcher spoke had many years of experience and the majority of them many years in the same setting. That was something that made them very secure about their practices. In addition, the fact that the researcher was seen in a one-time incident, coupled with the fact that she was from a different country allowed hoping that the influence of her presence to their decisions was very limited.

With regard to the children, during the first ten minutes of the researcher's presence in the setting the children were looking at her and in some occasions asked her name. When that happened the teacher explained that a visitor had come that day to see what they were doing in class. Then the children involved themselves in what the teacher initiated for them and gradually 'ignored' the researcher's presence. The fact that the researcher was sitting silently in a corner taking notes helped a lot towards that direction.

Duration of the observation

Fieldwork, according to Anderson (1998), is 'an essential component of qualitative research and the duration of it depends on the research design selected'. (p.125)

The duration of the observation in this case depended largely on the time and resources available. May (1997) also suggested that fieldwork 'permits the researcher to witness people's actions in different settings and ask themselves questions about motivations, beliefs and actions'. (p.142) Due to the fact that observation was used as a complementary technique as well as that there was only one researcher conducting the study the number of settings observed was small. The initial attempt was to spend one day at each setting so as to get the best possible understanding of what was going on in the class. The teachers decided the actual date of the visit. Almost every teacher asked if the researcher wanted to see a literacy lesson on that day. This allowed the consideration of the possibility that the classroom activity which the researcher observed may not represent the variety of

activities that can happen in a classroom, but instead teachers' beliefs of what was regarded as reading in their classrooms.

Pilot study

Decisions about the focus and scope of an observation involved trade-offs, which were necessitated by limited time and resources, but most of all due to lack of human ability to capture everything that takes place in a setting. What determined the structure of the observation checklist was once again what the researcher regarded as important. An answer to that was given through pilot study process.

Six settings were observed during June and July 2000. The settings were chosen at random and the only criterion that applied was easy access. The researcher stayed there a whole working day in the case of a Private Nursery and a whole session if it was a Nursery attached to a School. In the settings that reading took place during the visit, the researcher took as detailed notes as possible about the following issues: a)

✕ Did the layout of the classroom facilitate reading? b) To what kind of reading activities were the children introduced? c) Were the books easily accessible to the children? d) Were any of the activities that the children chose to spend time on (on their own incentive) related to reading? (A full transcript of an observation is given in Appendix 3.)

In the two settings where reading activities did not occur while the researcher was visiting, the researcher had a brief discussion with the teacher about how they

introduce reading to the children. The initial plan was to observe four children, two of each gender. The sample was what Robson (1993) called purposeful, which meant that the criteria had been set at the beginning of the study.

In this case the criteria were the following: the children had English as their first language, and in the opinion of the teacher, were readers of normal academic ability, and had no personal or emotional problems.

What actually happened was that practitioners argued that they were happy to have the researcher in their classes/establishments, but they felt uncomfortable with the idea of children being observed. Had the researcher insisted on observing the children, they would then have had to inform the parent/guardian of the child to ask permission. This was something that practitioners/teachers felt might upset parents/guardians.

Given the new situation, the researcher decided not to observe the children. Instead, through a non-participant observation approach, the researcher tried to gather detailed descriptive data about what took place in the establishments during her presence and through that to try and answer the initial questions about the class layout and the nature of the activities that the children were presented with.

Sampling process

Macmillan and Schumacher (1989) argued that purposeful sampling is a strategy used when one wants to come to understand something about certain selected cases without needing or desiring to generalise all such cases. Researchers use purposeful sampling to increase the utility of information obtained from small samples. Purposeful sampling can be used, according to Maxwell (1998), 'to achieve representatives or typicality of the settings, individuals or activities selected. A small sample that has been systematically selected for typicality and relative homogeneity provides far more confidence that the conclusions adequately represent the average members of the population than does a sample of the same size that incorporates substantial random variation.' (p.87)

When Pole and Lampard (2002) discussed the issue of samples in qualitative research, talked about pragmatic sampling and highlighted the importance of 'the range of cases sampled, the kind(s) of cases sampled, and the way(s) in which the cases are sampled'. (p.44) Pole and Lampard (2002) continued to argue that 'as noted by Patton (1990), combining different strategies may be appropriate'. (p.44)

What the researcher did was to observe the settings where the nine people who were interviewed taught/worked. Thus the researcher observed three settings of each category (Private Day Nurseries, Nursery Classes attached to Primary Schools, and Reception Classes). This meant that the sample was stratified. Weisberg, Krosnick, and Bowen (1996) also argued that the use of a stratified random sample permitted

the inclusion of parameters of special interest. In this case the parameter of special interest was the educational background or pre-service training that participants had relative to early years practice. In this case the participants who worked in Reception Classes were trained teachers while the rest of the participants held NVQ Level 3, BTEC and NNEB qualifications respectively. Taking this into account the sample may be characterised as 'stratified purposeful'. (Patton, 1990 (p.174)) Patton (1990) argued that the purpose of a stratified purposeful sample is 'to capture major variations rather than to identify a common core. Each of the strata would constitute a fairly homogenous sample. This strategy differs from stratified random sampling in that the sample sizes are likely to be too small for generalisation or statistical representativeness.' (p.174). Patton (1990) finally argued that 'stratified purposeful sampling illustrates characteristics of particular subgroups of interest and facilitates comparisons'. (p.182) With this in mind, nine observations were used as illustrative case studies.

Reliability and validity

'Validity in a qualitative sense is a personal strategy by which the researcher can manage the analytical movement between fieldwork and theory.' (Holliday, 2002 (p.81))

In this case the attempt was to develop a connection between different types of data questionnaires, description of classroom events, and interview accounts of teachers about their teaching and to rationalise the connection in order to plan through the

fieldwork. The researcher attempted to build a system of interconnected data, which enabled her to triangulate different aspects of the same topic.

Holliday (2002) also argued that an advantage of qualitative research is the 'possibility of considerable variation in the way a study is conducted and sequenced whichever model is used reference to the way in which research is carried out and how this interacts with setting is part of every study. It is this articulation of approach that carries the study and makes it valid.' (p.50)

In addition, Kirk and Miller (1986) argued that 'the contemporary search for reliability in qualitative observation revolves around detailing the relevant context of observation'. (p.52) Spradley (1979), in a series of suggestions regarding how to increase reliability, included 'short notes made at the time and expanded notes made as soon as possible after each field session'. (p.227) (both cited in Silverman, 2001 (p.227)) (Detailed observational notes are included in Appendix 3.)

At the same time, all research must respond to canons that stand as criteria against which the project can be evaluated. Guba and Lincoln (1985) referred to them as the 'true value' (p.290) of the study, its applicability, consistency and neutrality. By applicability, Guba and Lincoln (1999) referred to the extent to which 'the findings of a particular enquiry have applicability in other contexts or with other subjects. Consistency addresses whether or not the findings would be similar if the inquiry was replicated with similar subjects. Finally, neutrality examines the extent to which

the findings of an inquiry are determined by the respondents and not the biases, motivations or interests of the researcher.’ (p.398)

In qualitative research, reliability refers to the extent to which different researchers, given exposure to the same situation, would reach the same result. Due to the fact that human behaviour is never static and no study is replicated exactly, regardless of the methods and designs chosen, it can be claimed that no qualitative study can be reliable. But Macmillan and Schumacher (1989) argued that ethnographers can enhance the reliability of their data by making explicit five aspects of the design. ‘Researcher’s role, informant selection, context, data collection and analysis strategies, and analytical constructs and premises.’ (p. 189)

The researcher’s role

Anderson (1998) argued that ‘the quality of the responses, that is, their reliability and validity, is dependent on the interviewer. Different interviewers get different answers especially if question procedures and techniques are not standardised.’ (p.190) Reliability in qualitative research refers to the consistency of the researcher’s interactive style, data recording, data analysis and interpretation of the meanings in the data. Reliability is difficult because no researcher observes or interviews exactly like another.

Eliminating the actual influence of the researcher is impossible. So the goal in qualitative studies is to understand how a particular researcher's beliefs and values may influence the research and use it productively.

Informant selection

In order to avoid the threat to reliability, this was handled by careful descriptions of the informants and the decision processes used in their selection.

Context

Context influenced the content of the data. The context has the advantage of providing useful non-verbal information but at the same time it may affect the responses due to interruptions and pressures of time.

Data collection and analysis strategies

This involved precise description of the data collection and analysis strategies: the varieties of observational and interview methods, how data was recorded and under what circumstances. The researcher has to provide retrospective accounts of how the data was synthesised and identify general strategies of data analysis and interpretation.

Analytical premises

This had to do with making explicit the conceptual framework which informs the study and from which findings can be integrated or contrasted.

Validity on the other hand, refers to the extent to which what we measure reflects what we expected to measure. Lincoln and Guba (1999) argued that the terms internal and external validity and reliability that apply to the quantitative research are inappropriate to the naturalistic inquiry of qualitative research. Conversely they proposed four other constructs that reflect the assumptions of the qualitative research.

First, creditability in which the researcher had to 'demonstrate that the inquiry was conducted in such a way as to ensure that the subject was accurately identified and described'. (Marshall and Rossman, 1995 (p.143)) This asked the researcher to establish parameters and place boundaries around the study.

The second criterion that Lincoln and Guba (1999) proposed, according to Marshall and Rossman (1995), was transferability, which referred to 'the demonstration of the applicability of one set of findings to different contexts'. (p.144) Due to the nature of the research, the generalisation of the findings to other contexts, that is external validity, was considered to be problematic. One possible way of dealing with the problem was triangulation. Designing a study in which multiple cases or multiple data gathering methods, which applied in this case, have been used can strengthen its usefulness for other settings.

Third, dependability, in which, according to Lincoln and Guba (1999), as presented in Marshall and Rossman (1995), 'the researcher attempts to give an account for

changes in the phenomenon chosen for study or in the design followed during the study, due to a better understanding of the setting. This is acceptable in qualitative research under the assumption that the social world is under construction. On this basis the concept of replication is problematic.’ (p.145)

Fourth, confirmability has to do with ‘the concept of objectivity. It is about asking if the data helped confirm the findings.’ (Marshall and Rossman, 1995 (p.146))

Possible ways of dealing with the problems mentioned above are:

a) The use of a checklist was suggested by Maxwell (1998) as one way to deal with validity threats. ‘It operates by not verifying the conclusions, but by testing the validity of them as well as the existence of potential threats to them. The idea is to look for evidence that challenges the conclusions or makes the threat implausible.’ (pp.92-93)

b) Member check. This involves the systematic solicitation of the views of participants in the study about the data and conclusions. This is an important way of ruling out the possibility of the researcher misinterpreting what the participants said and the perspective they have on what is going on. Three of the participants in this research were willing to look at the transcripts and notes made during an extra meeting at their settings.

c) Rich data. In interview studies this implied the use of detailed transcripts instead of notes on what the researcher regarded as significant. For observation it involved detailed descriptive note taking about the specific events that were observed. It is data that is complete enough to provide a full picture of what is going on. Becker (1970) argued that such data ‘counters the twin dangers of respondent duplicity and observer bias by making it difficult for respondents to produce data that supports a mistaken conclusion, just as they make it difficult for the observer to restrict his/her observations so that s/he sees only what supports his/her expectations’. (p.52) The key function of rich data was to provide a test to the developing argument rather than a series of supporting instances.

	<i>Questionnaires</i>	<i>Interviews</i>	<i>Observations</i>
<i>Validity</i>	a) Face validity b) Content validity c) Standardisation	a) Constant comparative method b) Respondents' validation	Constant comparative method
<i>Reliability</i>	Test-retest reliability	a) Pre-testing of the interview schedules through pilot study b) Checks on the coding of answers to open-ended questions Proof of the use of <i>low-inference descriptions</i> : a) Tape-recording of the interview b) Transcription of the interview c) Long extracts of the data presented in the research report	Thick description

Table 3:1 *How validity and reliability were dealt with*

Ethics

Given that interviews and observations were conducted, the researcher's main priority was not to make the teacher feel defensive. Oppenheim (1996) argued that the major rule governing data collection is that no harm should be done to the respondents as a result of their participation in the research. Confidentiality was guaranteed as well as the right not to answer any questions the respondents did not feel comfortable dealing with. Permission to conduct the interview was asked from the head teachers/managers and teachers/educators themselves in person or via telephonic contact. In order to have informed consent the researcher needed to briefly explain the purpose and the nature of the study and guarantee that the material gathered would be used only for the purposes of the study. But as Weisberg, Krosnick and Bowen (1996) commented 'informed consent might be problematic because telling respondents about the topic of the research might lead them to answer questions differently than they would have done had they not known the topic'. (p.355) Finally, ethical issues related to sensitive topics or sponsorship did not apply in this particular research.

Qualitative researchers, according to Holliday (2002), accept the fact that research is ideology driven. There is no value-free or bias-free design. 'The qualitative researcher does not begin by choosing a method. Methods can be sufficiently flexible to grow naturally from the research question and in turn from the nature of the social setting in which the research is carried out. Qualitative research design begins with a question.' (p.20)

The method and methodology chapter was an attempt to address how this research was conducted. The aim was to explain what design and techniques were used and the reasons behind the choices. Robson (1993) defined conceptual framework as 'the main features of the research design' and their 'presumed relationships' and argued that 'it forces you to be explicit about what you think you are doing'. (p.150) Making decisions about methods and methodology means viewing research as a social process with its own conventions and changing practices.

3:6 Data analysis

The purpose of inquiry is to produce findings. The process of data collection is not an end in itself. The end point of an inquiry should involve analysis, interpretation and presentation of the findings. This section of the thesis is going to address the way that the data collected through questionnaires, interviews and observations was analysed.

Miles and Huberman (1984) argued that 'we have very few agreed-on canons for data analysis in the sense of shared ground rules for drawing conclusions and verifying their sturdiness'. (p.16) There are no ways of perfectly replicating the researcher's analytical thought processes. According to Patton (1990) 'there are no absolute rules except to do the very best with full intellect to fairly represent the data and communicate what the data reveals given the purpose of the study'. (p.372) This does not mean that there are no guidelines to assist in analysing data. But guidelines

and procedural suggestions are not rules. Applying guidelines requires judgement and creativity.

However, according to Patton (1990), the analyst's purpose is to 'gather comprehensive, systematic and in-depth information about each case of interest. The starting point for case analysis then is making sure the information for each case is as complete as possible.' (p.384)

Huberman and Miles (1998) argued that data analysis consists of the following three sub-processes: data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing and verification. These processes are aimed at ensuring high quality accessible data as well as documentation of what analysis has been carried out.

'With data reduction, the whole data set is reduced in an anticipatory way as the researcher chooses a conceptual framework, research questions, case studies and instruments. Data display is an organised, compressed assembly of information that permits action, thinking and conclusion drawing. The researcher needs to see a reduced set of data as the basis of thinking about its meanings.' Finally, according to Miles and Huberman (1998), conclusion drawing and verification involve the researcher in interpretation, i.e. drawing meaning from the displayed data.

The tactics used in this case ranged from the use of comparison/contrast noting of patterns and themes to confirmatory tactics such as triangulation, looking for

negative cases, and checking the results with the respondents. Regardless of the disciplinary influence, data analysis techniques in research are inductive and systematic. The goal for qualitative data management is to organise and store data for maximum efficiency concerning retrieval and analysis (pp.180-181).

Hammersly and Atkinson (1983) suggested that 'recording, storing and retrieving the data must be reflective processes in which decisions are made, monitored and if necessary, re-made in the light of methodological and ethical considerations. At the same time, however, these techniques play an important role in facilitating reflexivity. They provide a crucial resource in assessing the typicality of examples, triangulating across different data sources and stages of the fieldwork, and assessing the role of the researcher in shaping the nature of the data findings.' (p.173) This is the way in which all these techniques facilitate the process of analysis.

The rigour, duration and procedures of analysis vary according to the study's purpose and audience. In this case, the purpose of the study was to address teachers' beliefs about the teaching of reading and the methods used were questionnaires, interviews and observations.

3:7 Analysing questionnaires

The concept of triangulation, according to Padgett (1998), refers to 'the convergence of multiple perspectives that can provide greater confidence that what is being

targeted has been accurately captured'. (p.32) Rather than focusing on a single specific research question, multiple methods were used to address different but complementary questions within the study. The complementary purpose model was used that focuses on the use of different methods for alternative tasks. It is in effect what is happening when 'subsequent descriptive and exploratory work employs a sample survey'. (Robson, 1993 (p.290))

Having that in mind, questionnaires were analysed by the use of SPSS 8 (Statistic Programme for Social Sciences) as a first approach to teachers' beliefs about the teaching of reading.

In the survey, the researcher was less interested in the reasoning process than in whether people were giving replies that could be taken to represent their sense of appropriate answers. So being able to document what percentage of a survey population said that a particular line of action was appropriate, was, in the researcher's view, one facet of understanding teachers' beliefs. The next step was for the researcher to decide what the survey's relationship was to the other aspects of teachers' beliefs reflected in other parts of the data sets.

This study intended to address more than one facet of teachers' beliefs about the teaching of reading. That is why in the second part of this project the researcher attempted to use a smaller in-depth study using qualitative techniques of data collection and analysis. At the second stage the researcher wanted to see what actually happened in the classes and to what extent this was similar to, or different

from, the way that the individuals thought that reading ought to be taught. That was why people's reasoning processes were needed. The researcher asked the respondents to expand on the key topics covered in the questionnaire. On this basis, interviews and observations were used as a follow-up to what had already been stated.

Therefore, the division between the two stages of the study did not straightforwardly reflect the division between qualitative and quantitative work. Instead, both stages of the study were designed to ask questions about different levels of meaning. However, the two-stage design was intended to enhance the validity of the overall analysis by producing data gathered from different angles on teachers' beliefs that could build up a credible overall picture.

A key challenge, especially where the integration was between qualitative and quantitative data, was developing the necessary technical competencies to deal with data that has different logical principles. There were a number of issues to be taken into account: firstly, the existence of skills, secondly the ability to move easily between two different sets of assumptions, and finally, the researcher needed to think about what role computers could play in the process of qualitative analysis and data integration.

Since the main concern was the development of an overall view of the data, graphic representation was an appropriate method for qualitative analysis because it

provided for an effective way of coping with complex interactions, indicating the key concepts employed. Pictures provided a tool for conveying meaning. Another efficiency afforded by computers is, according to Bryman and Burgess (1994), 'the ability to sort, create and reformat files as they change and print out reconstituted files at ease. Computers easily attach labels to text and as easily find anything with a given label. Computerised methods are faster, cleaner and much more thorough than manual systems and take much less space.' (p.153) But they also have one main drawback – they do not allow the simultaneous visual access to materials that make ideas happen. There is no substitute for spreading the data out over the room to look for patterns. Computers do not offer a panoramic view of the data. On this basis, tables were used for the presentation of the data gathered by questionnaires, while other analytical strategies were chosen for the data gathered through interviews and observations.

3:8 Analysing interviews

Cohen and Manion (1994) defined interviews as a 'conversation initiated by the interviewer for the specific purpose of obtaining research-relevant information, and focused by her on content specified by research objectives'. (p.271) On this basis the researcher had to make a number of choices. These choices served the purpose of ruling out certain variables, relationships and associated data, and selecting others for attention. These are all factors that influence the way that analysis takes place and allowed Powney and Watts (1987) to argue that qualitative designs are not copiable but normally have to be custom-built and revised.

The first decision to be made in analysing the interviews was whether to begin with a case analysis or a cross-case analysis. Beginning with a case analysis meant writing a case study for each person interviewed. On the other hand, cross-case analysis meant grouping together answers from different people to common questions. Due to the fact that a small number of questions were used at each interview a cross case analysis was chosen as the most effective step towards comparisons and in-depth analysis.

In this case a standardised open-ended interview was used in order to minimise observer effects by asking the same set of questions to each of the respondents. Patton (1990) argued that 'if a standardised open-ended interview is used, it is easier to do a cross interview analysis for each question in the interview. With an interview guide approach, answers from different people can be grouped by topics from the guide but the relevant data will not be found in the same place in each interview. The interview guide actually constitutes a descriptive analytical framework for analysis.' (p.376)

In this case, six questions formed the interview guide aimed at addressing different aspects of teachers' beliefs on the teaching of reading.

Question 1 aimed to look into what the teacher felt obliged to teach the child.

Question 2 aimed at finding out if what the teacher actually taught with regards to reading was in accordance with what s/he would like to teach.

Question 3 focused on the kinds of activities through which the children were introduced to reading.

Question 4 aimed at discussing assessment processes in reading.

Question 5 asked whether difference in pre-service training had anything to do with the approach that teachers choose to teach reading.

Question 6 aimed at finding the first impressions that new Government documents about early years had created in the practitioners.

The fact that the interview guide was used as a framework for the analysis gave credit to Robson (1993), who claimed that there is not typically a precise point at which data collection ends and analysis begins. In the course of gathering data, ideas about possible analysis occur. This overlapping of data collection and analysis improves both the quality of data collected and the quality of the analysis as long as the researcher is careful not to allow these initial interpretations to further distort data collection.

Patton (1986) argued that instead of focusing data collection entirely on confirming the initial hypothesis, the researcher should become sensitive to looking for alternative explanations and patterns that would invalidate initial insights. That way, according to Patton (1990), when the researcher starts organising the analysis s/he will have two primary sources to draw from, 'the questions that were gathered during the conceptual phase of the study and clarified prior to final analysis, and analytic insights and interpretations that emerged during data collection'. (p. 378)

One final preliminary concern in analysing interviews was, according to Sapsford and Jupp (1996), to put away a copy for safekeeping and another for cutting and pasting of the data. The master copy becomes a key resource for locating materials and maintaining the context for the raw data. Once copies have been made data analysis can continue. 'The next stage is called content analysis: that is the process of identifying, coding and categorising the primary patterns in the data.' (Patton, 1990 (p.381))

The process of labelling the various kinds of data and establishing a data index is the first step in content analysis. The content of the data has been classified. A classification system is critical because it helps to simplify the complexity and make the data manageable.

Misher (1990) suggested that this could be achieved through the use of a set of specified analytic categories. Whether s/he starts with them (deduction) or gradually

gets to them (induction) depended on the researcher. Once again there was no single approach to qualitative data analysis. The researchers tend to pursue what works best given the data at hand. In this case, the interview guide formed the categories initially and after the transcription reading and labelling of the data, the initial categories were transformed on the basis of the data.

Strauss and Corbin (1991) allowed creativity into the scheme of analysis by suggesting that manipulation of categorising data is itself a creative act. They also argued that categories are organising tools that allow the sorting of the data according to relevant characteristics. That is how building blocks will occur and connections between the concepts will start to appear. It is difficult to separate the process of discovering a concept from the process of evaluating it. That is because the aim is not only to develop a conceptualisation but also to examine its adequacy in the light of the data.

Hamersley and Atkinson (1983) recommended 'immersing oneself in the data and then searching out patterns, identifying possibly surprising phenomena, and being sensitive to inconsistencies, such as divergent views offered by different interviewees. Sometimes new concepts will be generated, or in other cases concepts will be related to pre-existing notions.' (cited in Bryman and Burgess, 1994 (pp.6-7))

Guba (1978) suggested that in focusing on the analysis of qualitative data the researcher must deal with the problem of 'convergence'. The problem of convergence is finding out which things fit together. Miles and Huberman (1994) argued that the researcher at this stage had to be inductive and systematic; they suggested a set of tactics for generating meaning ranging from the descriptive to the exploratory and from the concrete to the more abstract. Miles and Huberman (1994) suggested that in order for the researcher to look for 'recurring regularities' in the data, s/he had to try and group the themes that emerge so as to help the reader to see the connections. Making contrasts or comparisons is a tactic to sharpen understanding by clustering and distinguishing observations. In addition, the researcher should make conceptual and theoretical coherence through comparison with constructs that s/he has referred to in the literature. Finally, assembling a coherent understanding of a data set is helped through building a logical chain of evidence. The fact that only six questions were used and each question addressed a different aspect of the same topic helped the conceptual grouping and the recognition of the regularities. Since this was small-scale research, the researcher was able to see the connections.

Every researcher may choose his/her process of analysis but the categories that will be created will be judged, according to Guba (1978), by two criteria: internal homogeneity and external heterogeneity. The first criterion concerned the extent to which data that belongs at a certain category holds together in a meaningful way.

The second criterion concerned the extent to which differences among the categories are clear.

The fact that in this case a brief discussion before the interview set the questions in a clear and specific context helped to create many similarities in the content of the responses.

The researcher attempted, through the classification system, to verify the meaningfulness and accuracy of the categories and the placement of data in these categories. Woods (1986) argued that the building of patterns and themes helps the researcher to delineate subgroups within the general category. Such devices can become helpful in the identification of differences in the data as well as the elucidation of concepts. Differences between components of such classifications can be important in generating the kind of links that would form the basis for the development of a theory. There is a chance that more than one classification system might be developed. In such cases the researcher has to prioritise and decide which category systems are more important than others. Prioritising is done according to uniqueness, feasibility and special interests. Finally, the categories are tested for completeness.

The small number of questions and interviewees, as well as the differences in their training and workplace made the classification easy and correspondingly the themes and the subgroups clear.

The second problem discussed by Guba (1978) was that of divergence. In this case the researcher had to give substance to the categories. This was done by processes of extension (i.e. building on information already known), making connections between different items and surfacing proposing information that might fit and then verifying its existence. The processes suggested by Guba (1978) are not mechanical. They involve technical and creative dimensions. An utilisation-focused approach to analysis (Patton, 1986) helps to keep the findings from becoming too abstract or too theoretical. An utilisation-focused approach is based on constant evaluation of information about the activities, characteristics and outcomes of research. The evaluation is databased. The researcher brought an empirical perspective to answer questions of effectiveness. The evaluation was done having specific intended uses in mind.

Wilcot (1994) argued that these procedures impose order on the management of data. On this understanding, the extent to which certainty was associated with analysis derived from those procedures. But in every case a realistic cost benefit appraisal needed to be part of any decision to pursue or drop a line of enquiry.

3:9 Analysing observations

Guba (1978) suggested that the task of converting field notes and observations on issues into systematic categories was a difficult one. No infallible procedure existed for performing it.

According to Bell (1987) analysis of observation is a matter of personal preference (p.91). In this case, observation and analysis were to some extent intertwined. The information obtained through observations was compared with information gathered through questionnaires. Observation notes were used to triangulate any points that came out through questionnaire analysis. The data was sorted through descriptive notes that were categorised under headings included in observational sheets. In this particular case the following issues were addressed:

- Did the layout of the classroom facilitate reading?
- What kind of reading activities were the children introduced to?
- Were the books easily accessible to the children?

Dey (1993) suggested that ‘description provided the basis for analysis. Through analysis a fresh view of the data was obtained by breaking it down into bits and seeing how these interconnected, leading to a new account based on the re-conceptualisation of the data.’ (p.36) Breaking down the different data could help the classification process, creating concepts and making connections between them.

But Denzin (1994) claimed that description must be carefully separated from interpretation that involves explaining the findings and putting patterns into an analytic framework. The disciplined qualitative analysis depended on presenting descriptive data in a way that is often called ‘thick description’ – so that others reading the results can understand and draw their own interpretation.

Denzin (1978) argued that comprehensive description encompassed the context of the action, the intentions of the actor and the processes in which actions were embedded. Qualitative analysis aimed to provide thorough descriptions in each of these areas. Thinking of observation as an abstraction of what was happening, the researcher could understand the above aspects of description.

Since meaning was context-dependent, the researcher could not rely on the subject's intentions as an unequivocal guide to interpretation. 'The subjects perceive and define situation including their own intentions, according to their understanding of their own motivations and the contexts in which they act.' (Dey, 1993 (p.36))

Taking this into account, the researcher in this particular case took notes about the teachers' attitude towards her as well as about the interview itself during and immediately after the visit to schools. In addition, part of the information that was gathered during the observations had to do with the way children were seated, as well as a brief description of the classroom environment.

Sanger (1996) argued that interpretation and explanation were the responsibility of the analyst and the task was to develop a meaningful and adequate account. These required the development of a conceptual framework through which the actions or events could be rendered intelligibly. Wilcot (1994) suggested 'following and reporting systematic fieldwork procedures'. (p.32) In order to restrict the interpretative side of the attempt the researcher had to stick to the framework that

guided data collection, and tried to meet its requirements. The researcher faced the task of reducing the amount of data taken in, while still gathering more. The idea was to focus much of the data collection on emerging themes or constructs and yet collect additional data. The analysis was ongoing.

But to a certain extent, the researcher became a participant in the process. On this basis, information on the researcher's behaviour and thinking could become a significant source of data for the analysis. Sanger and Schostak (1981) emphasised the differences between researchers as analysts. They claimed that every researcher has to take into account a number of factors that are not related to the quality of the data. First-time researchers had to be critical due to the large amount of data that can be dealt with. Also, new researchers had the tendency to over react or under react to new information. Furthermore, researchers tend to disregard the fact that some sources of information are more reliable than others, while information that is difficult to obtain gets less attention than that which is easier to obtain.

Errors in the field can be corrected after the pilot study. Changes in the observational protocols or interview schedules can reflect a better understanding of the setting and therefore enhance the internal validity of the study. Researchers always need to consider whether they have approached and set the problem in an appropriate way. The possibility of further refining of the problem or altering the course of inquiry should always remain open.

A discussion of analysis has been provided by Bogdan and Biklen (1982), who distinguished between analysis in the field and analysis after data collection. In analysis in the field they suggested a number of analytic strategies that the researcher might use during data collection. Such strategies include: forcing oneself to narrow the focus of the study, continually reviewing field notes in order to determine if new questions can be asked, writing memos of what has been found in relation to various issues, and trying out emergent ideas. Analysis after the data collection is essentially concerned with the development of a coding system.

In order to deal with the possible extent of these problems, notes were taken on the spot and at a different school every time. In addition, notes were taken in Greek – the native language of the researcher – which offered the chance of detailed notes and more information.

Wilcot (1994) argued that ‘the main aim for the researcher is to achieve a balance between description, analysis and interpretation. The nature, as well as the purpose, of the study will define the extent of that balance.’ (p.46)

In an attempt to increase objectivity, the researcher in this case wrote a small summary of what occurred during every school visit. These observational recordings formed background knowledge and occasionally a means to emphasise some important comment. On this basis, the recordings saved time for the researcher since they helped to get the data to a more conceptual level.

Coding

According to Bryman and Burgess (1994), hypothetical links between the categories need to be formulated and tested in the field. Links with other theoretical schemes are then explored as further revision of the hypothesis and carried out as a result of both data collection and theoretical reflection.

Categories, according to Fillias (1996), have to be exhaustive and all-encompassing so that the aims of every question are covered. Also, categories have to be mutually exclusive so that every question is only included in one category.

Coding represents a key step in the process. Chamaz (1983) described it as 'simply the process of categorising and sorting data' (p.111), while codes are described as 'serving to summarise, synthesise and sort many observations made from the data'. (p.112)

Miles and Huberman (1984) observed that 'there is a close connection between coding and the generations of concepts, regardless of whether the latter are pre-specified and later revised or emergent. Coding draws to an end when repetition is being observed. New information tends to confirm the existing classification scheme and discrepant cases stop appearing. As linkages between codes are observed themes begin to take shape.' (p.60) Regardless of how analysis unfolds, the highest levels of abstraction involve linking the study back to the existing knowledge base. That is why the contribution of a qualitative study partially depends on the reflection of the

meaning and the interpretation of the study's findings from the researcher's perspective.

The researcher in this study tried to follow what Patton (1990) called 'inductive analysis'. Having data grounded in specific contexts, the researcher tried to 'allow the important analysis dimensions to emerge from patterns found in cases under study without presupposing in advance what the important dimensions would be'. The researcher attempted to understand 'the multiple interrelationships among dimensions that emerge from the data without making prior assumptions or specific hypotheses about narrowly defined operationalised variables'. (p.44)

CHAPTER 4

RESULTS

4:1 Presentation of the questionnaire findings

The first method of data collection was a survey questionnaire. The aim of this section of the thesis is to present the questionnaire findings. A total of a hundred and sixty-three questionnaires were distributed between November 2000 and March 2001 in early years settings in the Coventry and Birmingham areas. Eighty-six were completed and returned indicating a 52.7% response rate. The fact that three of the settings included in the sample stopped offering their services slightly increases the response rate. The results were analysed by using the SPSS 8 programme (Statistic Programme for Social Sciences).

The questionnaire was divided into four sections. The first included introductory questions to find out if the sample represented a normal range of early years practitioners. Questions 1 to 7 gave background information about the respondents.

According to Leake (2001), 'boys in Nursery School should be taught in some classes separate from girls to compensate for the near absence of male teachers and "boyish" activities in their education'. According to this report, women have always dominated Nursery and Primary teaching, but in recent years the imbalance has

grown with just one per cent of Britain's 215,000 Primary School teachers being men. A survey by Penn and McQuail (1997) also revealed that women thought that they brought a 'natural' talent to the job and felt that this aptitude was at least as important if not more important than training. Penn went on to argue that such attitudes are problematic. These attitudes do a disservice to men wishing to enter the profession, as they suggest that men do not possess those aptitudes. Such aptitudes 'create barriers to raising the status of the professional roles associated with early childhood practitioners'. (cited in Karstadt, Lilley and Miller, 2000 (p.26)) Taking these into account, we might expect that all the sample members of this survey were females.

'A series of influential reports published in the last decade has highlighted the importance of high-quality training for those who work in the early years. (DES 1990, National Commission of Education 1993, Audit Commission 1996, DfES 1999b) Further, one of the conclusions reached by the RSA Learning Inquiry was that the calibre and training of the professionals who work with children are the key determinants of high quality provision.' (Ball, 1994) (cited in Abbott and Hevey, 2001 (p.179))

Reflecting on this, Question 3 showed that the highest level of educational attainment of the respondents varied greatly in type and duration as well as the minimum age for beginning training and the qualifications necessary for entry.

The results are presented in Table 4:1.

<i>Qualification</i>	<i>Percentage of Respondents holding this Qualification (n=86)</i>
Teachers' Certificate	24.4 %
B.Ed.	22.1 %
NNEB	15.1 %
PGCE	10.5 %
BA (QTS)	9.3 %
BTEC	7.0 %
NVQ in Child Care (3 and 4)	4.7 %
BA	3.5 %
B.Sc.	3.5 %

Table 4:1 Qualifications of respondents

More specifically thirty-one respondents (36.1% of the sample) had recognised qualifications that can be included under the scope of vocational courses. Furthermore, forty-nine cases (57%) had been to college, while only six people (7%) had been to university.

There were cases where the respondents held more than one vocational qualification, or a vocational qualification and a PGCE. Also, there were four cases where in addition to the main qualification, the respondents held the following: MA in Education (M.Ed.), Licentiate of College Preceptors (LCP), Associate of College Preceptors (ACP), and Teaching English as a Second Language Diploma. Finally, one person, held a Psychology-Nursery Foundation Teaching Diploma, whilst another was a registered nurse.

This study seems to indicate what Abbott and Pugh (1998) acknowledged when they argued that ‘the ways in which early years workers become competent, knowledgeable and skilful will continue to be many and varied’. (p.156)

The Audit Commission (1996) argued that ‘early years education does not only take place at schools. All services for young children can contribute to both their education and care. Legislation leaves the provision largely to local authorities’ discretion and to the incentive of the private and voluntary sectors.’ (p.6) Question 4 presented the kind of early years settings in which respondents worked.

The results are presented in Table 4:2.

<i>Early Years Setting</i>	<i>% of Respondents Working in the Setting (n=86)</i>
Nursery School	1.2%
Nursery Class attached to Primary School (non-denominational)	14%
Nursery Class attached to RC School	3.5%
Nursery Class attached to CE School	1.2%
Reception Class	10.5%
Reception Class attached to Primary School (non-denominational)	27.9%
Reception Class attached to RC School	7%
Reception Class attached to CE School	7%
Private Day Nursery	16.3%
Workplace Nursery	2.3%
Community and non-profit making Day Nursery	4.7%
University/College/School Day Nursery	1.2%
Other	3.5%

Table 4:2 Early years settings/workplaces of the respondents

The Rumbold Committee (1990, para.2) suggested that under the broad title of Nursery we can find: local authority Day Nurseries which give places to children from families who can demonstrate the greatest need; Private Day Nurseries with places given to those who can pay; workplace Nurseries offering day care facilities for the children of employees; local educational authority Nursery Schools and Classes which provide free education for children between three and five years; and combined Nursery Centres which integrate day care and nursery facilities in a single unit, again usually providing for the families that can demonstrate the greatest need.

Since the establishments of early years provision were many and varied, for the purposes of this study all the kinds of Nursery Classes attached to Primary Schools offered have been amalgamated into one category. The same applies for Reception Classes attached to Primary Schools. Finally all the settings that offer Day Care, private or publicly funded, have been included in one category as well.

The overall findings are presented in Table 4:3.

<i>Early Years Establishment</i>	<i>% of Respondents Working in the Establishment (n=86)</i>
Nursery Classes	19.8%
Reception Classes	52.3%
Private Day Nurseries / Day Care Centres	27.9%

Table 4:3 *Percentage of respondents working in each early years establishment*

The length of teaching experience as well as the number of children for whom practitioners were responsible could be considered as factors that may influence the course of action in early years establishments.

Question 2: Length of respondents’ teaching experience.

<i>Length of Experience</i>	<i>% of Respondents with this Length of Experience (n=86)</i>
1 year	4.7%
2-5 years	10.5%
6-10 years	19.8%
11-20 years	33.7%
More than 20 years	30.2%

Table 4:4 Length of respondents’ teaching experience
(Missing cases: 1 = 1.2%)

In terms of their work experience, respondents could be almost equally divided into three groups. Thirty of them (35% of the sample) had from one to ten years of work experience, while twenty-six (30.2%) were at the other end of the spectrum with more than twenty years of work experience. The remaining twenty-nine cases (33.7%) of the respondents fell under the category of eleven to twenty years.

In a review of literature carried out by the Thomas Coram Research Unit regarding research on staffing ratios 1980-1993, questions were raised about two issues; the very principle of setting national guidelines on staff ratios, as well as about the justification of different ratios applying to children of the same age in day care settings on the one hand compared to education services on the other.

After reviewing eighty studies they concluded that ‘staffing plays a critical role in determining the performance of the services. It represents by far the largest element in the financing of services, and it is therefore central to cost as well as to quality.’ (McGurk et al., 1995 (p.1)) McGurk et al. (1995) also argued that ‘research cannot identify ideal ratios because they will depend on many factors including: the objectives of the service; the needs of the children; the job descriptions of the staff and their working conditions’. (p.23) Reflecting on this Question 6 presented the number of children for whom practitioners were responsible.

The results are presented in Table 4:5.

<i>Number of Children</i>	<i>% of Respondents Responsible for this Number of Children (n=86)</i>
Under 20	14%
Between 21 and 25	25.6%
Between 26 and 30	32.6%
Between 31 and 35	5.8%
36 or more	9.3%
Other	12.8%

Table 4:5 Number of children under respondents’ responsibility

Fifty of the respondents (58.2%) taught between twenty-one and thirty children. On the other hand, twenty-five of the respondents (29.1%) taught between the two extremes of less than twenty children (twelve cases representing 14%) and thirty-one to thirty-six or more (thirteen cases, 15.1%) respectively. The remaining eleven cases (12.8%) were positioned at the two ends of the spectrum. There were three cases where the number of children was less than ten, another three where the educator was responsible for sixty children divided into two classes of thirty, and

one case where the practitioner was responsible for one hundred and sixty children. As for the remaining four cases, two respondents wrote 'Manager of the Crèche', while the third was responsible for fifty children. Finally the fourth was owner of the setting.

Questions 5 and 7 aimed at linking background information with the teaching of reading.

The introduction of a Foundation Stage and Early Learning Goals placed additional requirements on the training of early years teachers. 'There are concerns that the demands of the Literacy and Numeracy hour, the need for knowledge of the National Curriculum up to Key Stage 2, and the requirement of some experience of working with children in the older primary age range, all eat time in an already full PGCE curriculum to develop multi-disciplinary approaches to work in the early years.' (Hevey and Abbott, 2001 (p.187))

Taking that into account Question 5 aimed to find out if any of the respondents held any post related to the teaching of reading in their establishment.

Fifty-eight of the respondents (67.4% of the sample) gave a negative answer to the question. From the remaining sample members who answered positively and specified their posts, only seventeen cases (19.7%) were actually related to teaching

reading. The fact that 11.6% of the sample gave responses that could not be linked with teaching reading suggests that the respondents did not understand the question.

The last question that provided personal information (Question 7) asked the respondents whether or not they felt confident about their ability to teach reading.

The results are presented in Table 4:6.

<i>Level of Confidence</i>	<i>% of Respondents with this Amount of Confidence (n=86)</i>
Very confident	44.2%
Quite confident	38.4%
Confident in a limited way	9.3%
Not at all confident	2.3%
Do not know / Cannot tell	1.2%

Table 4:6 Respondents' confidence in teaching reading
(Missing cases: 4 = 4.7%)

It appears that the majority of the respondents (representing 88.6%) felt either very or quite confident to teach reading. Only ten practitioners (11.6%) felt confident in a limited way or not at all confident in teaching reading.

Cross tabulations were used to find out the kind of qualifications held by practitioners who expressed varying levels of confidence.

The results are presented in Table 4:7.

<i>Qualification</i>	<i>Level of Confidence</i>				
	<i>Very confident</i>	<i>Quite confident</i>	<i>Limited confidence</i>	<i>No confidence</i>	<i>Don't know/ Cannot tell</i>
BTEC		9%			
Teachers' Certificate	39.4%	15.1%			
BA (QTS)	5.2%	18.1%			
BA	2.6%	3%		50%	
PGCE	10.5%	12.1%	12.5%		
NVQ in Child Care		6%	25%		
B.Ed.	28.9%	21.2%	12.5%		
NNEB	5.2%	15.1%	50%	50%	100%
B.Sc.	7.8%				
N = 82	38	33	8	2	1

Table 4:7 Respondents' qualifications and confidence in teaching reading
(Missing cases: 4 = 4.7%)

The vast majority of the sample members felt either quite confident or very confident to teach reading including all the BTEC holders and more than half of the NNEB holders respectively.

It seems though that half of the people who felt confident in a limited way to teach reading held NNEB qualifications, while 25% of them held an NVQ in Child Care. Moreover, only two PGCE holders and B.Ed. holders respectively (representing in each case 12.5%) felt less confident in teaching reading. Finally, only two people who held a BA and an NNEB respectively did not feel comfortable teaching reading.

In the second section of the questionnaire (Questions 8 and 9), teachers' beliefs about reading were addressed. The members of the sample were asked to rank their preference or rate their agreement with a range of statements on a scale from 1 to 5.

The different ways in which what happens during the act of reading is understood have been summarised in a series of models. Each model describes and attempts to explain the way the skills and the processes that are involved in the act of reading can be given a different emphasis and also represent different definitions of reading.

Having in mind the three theoretical models of the reading process (bottom-up, top-down and interactive) and despite the fact that Merchant (1999) argued that 'this is rather an artificial distinction' (p.71), Question 9 was given to the respondents in an attempt to understand from which theoretical position they looked at reading.

The respondents were presented with three statements and asked to grade them in terms of importance on a scale from 1 to 3 starting with the most important statement. In an attempt to calculate the results, the researcher decided to reverse the scores. Thus 3 points were given to respondents' most important case, 2 to the second most important and 1 to the least important. The aim behind the decision was to be able to have zero representing the missing cases.

Then the numbers given to each variable were added together, and the total represented how respondents rated the basic characteristics involved in beginning reading in terms of importance.

The results are presented in Table 4:8.

<i>Basic Characteristic</i>	<i>Total Score*(n=86)</i>
Being able to integrate skills	194
Knowing the alphabetical code	156
Being able to extract meaning from the text	148

Table 4:8 Respondents’ rating of the basic characteristics of beginning reading

- * 3 points awarded for the most important
- 2 points awarded for the second most important
- 1 point awarded for the least important

It can be argued that the sample members were of the opinion that first in significance in their teaching of reading was the ability to integrate skills in order to extract meaning. This implies that the reader arrives at the meaning by using information from several knowledge sources simultaneously.

Browne (1998) argued that ‘the teaching of reading is influenced by the conscious and unconscious assumptions teachers have about what is involved in learning to read and, albeit simplistically, this can be matched to the models of reading. The model that teachers and schools subscribe to affects which skills and processes they stress and the order in which they are taught. This is linked to the definition of reading that teachers have and their understanding of reading strategies and uses of reading.’ (p.8)

In Question 9 the respondents were presented with constituent aspects of reading as well as with a set of skills that are involved in learning to read. They were asked once again to rate their agreement, this time on a scale from 1 to 5.

The results are presented in Table 4:9.

<i>Level of Agreement (n=86)</i>	<i>Statement</i>		
	<i>Children learn to read naturally as they acquire language skills</i>	<i>Phonics is the most important way of helping children to read</i>	<i>Direct teaching of phonics is not necessary since children learn the alphabetical code by encountering text in the company of literate people</i>
Strongly Agree	4.7%	18.6%	2.3%
Agree	34.9%	53.5%	4.7%
Disagree	33.7%	14%	50%
Strongly Disagree	11.6%	3.5%	36%
Neutral	11.6%	8.1%	7%
Missing Cases	3 = 3.5%	2 = 2.3%	

Table 4:9 Respondents’ views on the ways children learn to read

Commenting on whether or not these early years practitioners thought that children could become natural readers, it can be argued that a relatively balanced division seems to appear.

Nearly half of the sample members, thirty-nine people (45.3%) disagreed with the statement that children learn to read naturally. These respondents agreed with Browne (1998) who argued that young readers begin to read by drawing on what they know about the meaningfulness of language. Their recreation of meaning is confirmed, or not, by the selective sampling of words and letters. ‘Phonics and word matching skills, which enable readers to translate letters and words into oral equivalents, develop in context and are needed to refine the readers’ ability; they are not regarded as the basis of it.’ (p.9)

At the same time, thirty-four respondents (39.6%) were positioned at the other end of the spectrum and agreed that children learn to read naturally. Cross tabulations were used in order to match respondents’ qualifications with their feelings towards children’ s ability to learn to read naturally.

The results are presented in Table 4:10.

<i>Qualification (n=83)</i>	<i>Children learn to read naturally as they acquire language skills</i>					
	<i>Strongly Agree</i>	<i>Agree</i>	<i>Disagree</i>	<i>Strongly Disagree</i>	<i>Neutral</i>	<i>N=83</i>
BTEC		66.6%			33.3%	6
Teachers’ Certificate		23.8%	42.8%	23.8%	9.5%	21
BA (QTS)		42.8%	28.5%	14.2%	14.2%	7
BA			66.6%	33.3%		3
PGCE		37.5%	37.5%		25%	8
NVQ in Child Care	25%	75%				4
B.Ed.	5.2%	21%	47.3%	15.7%	10.5%	19
NNEB	16.6%	58.3%	16.6%		8.3%	12
B.Sc.		33.3%	66.6%			3

Table 4:10 Respondents’ qualifications and views on children’s ability to learn to read naturally

The results show that all the NVQ in Child Care holders as well as the vast majority of the BTEC and the NNEB holders (66.6% and 74.9% respectively) agreed that children learn to read naturally. In addition, 26.2% of the B.Ed. holders agreed that children learn to read naturally while 10.5% of them took a neutral stance.

In the same line of argument 62.5% of the PGCE holders as well as 57% of the BA (QTS) holders agreed or took a neutral stance regarding the statement that children learn to read naturally. In the case of the Teachers' Certificate holders, the percentage of those who either agreed or took a neutral stance increases to 33%.

Returning to the initial question (Table 4:9), the respondents seemed to have a very positive opinion regarding the importance of phonics in children's learning to read. 72.5% of the sample (sixty-two cases) agreed that phonics was the most important way of teaching children to read. Coupled with the fact that there was a clear acceptance of the necessity to teach phonics if the children were to learn to read (seventy-six cases, 86%), it seems that the respondents acknowledged that reading is a process that emphasises the identification and analysis of units of language on the page. At the same time there were twenty-two respondents (25.6%) who either disagreed or chose the neutral option regarding phonics being the most important way of teaching reading, as well as thirteen respondents (13%) who disagreed or chose a neutral option with regards to the necessity of teaching phonics. This shows that there are opposing views to an argument.

Cross tabulations were used in order to match respondents’ qualifications with their feelings towards the use of phonics as the most important teaching technique regarding the teaching of reading. By identifying closely how and what practitioners want children to learn at different ages and stages, teachers can broaden and deepen the range of learning opportunities available. On top of that they can aim at greater consistency across the different forms of under-fives provision.

The results are presented in table 4:11.

<i>Qualification</i>	<i>Phonics is the most important way of teaching children to read</i>					<i>N=84</i>
	<i>Strongly Agree</i>	<i>Agree</i>	<i>Disagree</i>	<i>Strongly Disagree</i>	<i>Neutral</i>	
BTEC	16.6%	66.6%			16.6%	6
Teachers’ Certificate	19%	66%	4.7%	4.7%	4.7%	21
BA (QTS)		33.3%	33.3%		33.3%	6
BA	33.3%	66.6%				3
PGCE	11.1%	22.2%	44.4%	11.1%	11.1%	9
NVQ in Child Care	25%	75%				4
B.Ed.	26.3%	47.3%	21%	5.2%		19
NNEB	23%	53.8%	7.6%		15.3%	13
B.Sc.		100%				3

Table 4:11 *Respondents’ qualifications and views on whether phonics is the most important way of teaching children to read*

The results show that those who chose to disagree or hold a neutral stance regarding phonics being the most effective way of teaching reading tended to hold a PGCE, BA (QTS), and B.Ed. respectively. The strong opinions presented regarding the three models of reading indicated the importance that all three have to these teachers. Merchant (1999) argued that ‘since reading is about the active construction of meaning, the distinct areas of reading that are taught within the context of

meaningful literacy activities are: literacy awareness, syntactic awareness, word recognition, phonological awareness and orthographic awareness’. (p.72)

In addition, the Early Learning Goals (QCA 1999) clearly emphasised the centrality of speaking and listening skills in pupils’ development and the specific development of language and literacy.

The second part of Question 9 involved a set of characteristics, which were regarded as related to the teaching of reading.

The results are presented in Table 4:12.

<i>Reading Skill (n=86)</i>	<i>Chartaracteristics of Reading</i>					
	<i>Strongly Agree</i>	<i>Agree</i>	<i>Disagree</i>	<i>Strongly Disagree</i>	<i>Neutral</i>	<i>Missing Cases</i>
Comprehension	40.7%	43.3%	9.3%		2.3%	4=4.7%
Word recognition	48.8%	46.5%	3.5%			1=1.2%
Knowledge of letters & sounds	67.4%	31.4%	1.2%			
Speaking	48.8%	43%	1.2%	2.3%	3.5%	1=1.2%
Listening	44.2%	43%	3.5%	1.2%	7%	1=1.2%
Thinking	50%	43%	3.5%	1.2%	2.3%	

Table 4:12 Reading skills

As for this part of the question it was the first time that unanimity seems to have appeared.

Almost all sample members (98.8%) thought that knowledge of letters and sounds was of utmost importance in learning to read, while word recognition closely followed with 95.3% (eighty-two cases). Thinking and speaking also presented the same unanimous agreement level with eighty and seventy-nine cases (93% and 91.8%) respectively. As for the remaining two characteristics, that of comprehension and listening, the level of agreement ranged from 84% (seventy-two cases) to 87.2% (seventy-five cases) respectively.

In the next question (Question 10, the first in Section 3 of the questionnaire), the respondents were asked again to indicate their level of agreement in a series of statements about teaching reading. QCA (1997) argued that 'good planning is essential for ensuring a broad, balanced and purposeful curriculum. As well as identifying what the children should learn, curriculum plans also need to take account of how it is intended the teaching and learning will take place.' (p.5)

The attitudes and expectations of the adults they are with have an effect on the attitudes children develop as they mature. Children need a 'rhythm' to the day and to know what is coming next. A balance of active, quiet individual, and group times is important especially for those attending full day care. However, young children need substantial periods of time for uninterrupted freely chosen play both indoors and outdoors.

Question 10 addressed aspects of planning and underlying principles that influence the teaching of reading.

The results are presented in Table 4:13.

<i>Statement (n=86)</i>	<i>Level of Agreement</i>					
	<i>Strongly Agree</i>	<i>Agree</i>	<i>Disagree</i>	<i>Strongly Disagree</i>	<i>Do Not Know</i>	<i>Missing Cases</i>
There is a fixed sequence of reading experiences which is necessary for the child to follow	11.6%	31.4%	37.2%	8.1%	10.5%	1=1.2%
It is necessary for the children to do reading at a fixed time every day	1.2%	7%	45.3%	43%	3.5%	
Methods of teaching reading should be subject to whole-school decision-making	26.7%	44.2%	16.3%	4.7%	5.8%	2=2.3%
Teachers' beliefs should be taken into account when decisions are made by the authorities about the National Curriculum	46.5%	44.2%	1.2%	1.2%	5.8%	1=1.2%
What I have to teach about reading this year is manageable	17.4%	61.6%	5.8%	1.2%	9.3%	4=4.7%

Table 4:13 Respondents' views on the ways of teaching reading

Almost all the sample members (90.7%, seventy-eight cases) were of the opinion that teachers' beliefs should be taken into account when the authorities make decisions about the National Curriculum.

The majority of the respondents also agreed that methods of teaching reading should be subject to whole-school decision-making (sixty-one cases, 70.9%) as well as that what they had to teach this year in terms of reading was manageable (79%, sixty-eight cases). But at the same time eighteen cases (21%) were against the idea of methods of teaching reading being part of whole-school decision-making.

Rodd (1994) argued that the 'early childhood profession is dominated by individual beliefs, values and perspectives which can have a strong emotional component. Understanding that not all people are likely to accept or agree with the goals and policies followed is important.' (p.56) This was the first question in which the respondents expressed their serious disagreement with more than one of the statements.

More specifically, only seven people (8.2%) agreed that children should be taught reading at a fixed time every day. This suggests a preference for flexibility in teaching reading at this level. In addition, the sample was almost equally divided when it came to answering whether or not there was a fixed sequence of reading activities for the children to follow. Thirty-seven cases (43%) agreed with this statement, while 45.3% (thirty-nine cases) gave a negative answer. Since there was division among the sample, cross tabulations were once again used to find the extent to which the pre-service training that practitioners had was related to their agreement or disagreement regarding teaching reading through a fixed sequence of activities.

The next table shows how the respondents’ preferences were spread (Table 4:14).

<i>Qualification</i>	<i>Reading should be taught through a fixed sequence of activities</i>					<i>N=85</i>
	<i>Strongly Agree</i>	<i>Agree</i>	<i>Disagree</i>	<i>Strongly Disagree</i>	<i>Neutral</i>	
BTEC		40	60			5
Teachers’ Certificate	23.8	47.6	14.2	9.5	4.7	21
BA (QTS)		25	37.5	12.2	25	8
BA		33.3	66.6			3
PGCE		44.4	44.4	11.1		9
NVQ in Child Care	25	50	25			4
B.Ed.	15.7	15.7	36.8	10.5	21	19
NNEB	7.6	23	46.1	7.6	15.3	13
B.Sc.			100			3

Table 4:14 Respondents’ qualifications and views on whether there is a fixed sequence of reading experiences which is necessary for the child to follow

All the B.Sc. holders and more than half of the PGCE and BA holders opposed the idea of a fixed sequence of activities as an effective way of teaching reading.

In addition, 49.7% of the BA (QTS) holders and 47.3% of the B.Ed. holders thought that a fixed sequence of activities might not be a suitable way of teaching reading. On the contrary, 75% of the NVQ in Child Care holders as well as 71.4% of the Teacher Certificate holders and 30.6% of the NNEB holders thought that a fixed sequence of reading activities was the best way to introduce reading to the children. This was unexpected since the role of the adult in the premises that NVQ and NNEB holders work might be considered as enabling rather than directly teaching reading.

Field and Lally (1996) reviewed the variety of curriculum documents for children from three to five years old; the report for Quality and Diversity Project (ECEP 1997) has shown how the views of practitioners working with children from birth to eight suggest appropriate interpretations for the five to eight-year-olds.

As for this research, the vast majority of the respondents believed that the Early Learning Goals (QCA 1999) was a key document in their teaching of reading. At this point it needs to be mentioned that this research was conducted before the Curriculum Guidance for the Foundation Stage (QCA 2000) came into effect.

The results are presented in Table 4:15.

<i>Statement (n=86)</i>	<i>Level of Agreement</i>					
	<i>Strongly Agree</i>	<i>Agree</i>	<i>Disagree</i>	<i>Strongly Disagree</i>	<i>Do Not Know</i>	<i>Missing Cases</i>
A framework for teaching	24.4%	60.5%	8.1%		2.3%	4=4.7%
Useful for planning teaching	22.1%	67.4%	3.5%	1.2%	3.5%	2=2.3%
Useful for carrying out teaching	11.6%	60.5%	17.4%	1.2%	5.8%	3=3.5%
A means of assessing children's learning	20.9%	67.4%	3.5%	4.7%		3=3.5%

Table 4:15 Respondents' views on the Early Learning Goals (QCA 1999)

These practitioners saw the Early Learning Goals (QCA 1999) as a framework for teaching reading useful for their planning and a means of assessing children's progress. The levels of agreement in the three statements mentioned above were 84.9% (seventy-three cases), 89.4% (seventy-seven cases) and 88.3% (seventy-six

cases) respectively. But at the same time 18.6% (sixteen cases) were *not* of the opinion that Early Learning Goals (QCA 1999) was a useful means of carrying out teaching. Adding to that the 5.8% (five people) who fell under the category of ‘do not know’, it was obvious that despite the fact that the rate of agreement remained high (72.1%, sixty-two cases), the response was by no means unanimous.

The remaining questions (11 to 18) formed the last part of the questionnaire and were about teaching reading in the early years classroom.

In Question 11, the respondents were presented with a list of teaching reading techniques, and were asked to rank them in order of the frequency of their use. Respondents were asked to give 1 point to the most frequently used technique, 2 to the second most frequent etc. Once again in order to calculate the results the values were reversed. Thus 7 points were given to the most frequently used technique, 6 points to the next most frequent and 1 was given to the least frequently used technique. Zero represented the missing cases. All the numbers given to each technique were added together and the total represented how the respondents order teaching techniques.

The results are presented in Table 4:16.

<i>Technique (n=86)</i>	<i>Total Score*</i>
Story telling	485
Big books	459
Play	408
Reading schemes	294
Group reading	274
Paired reading	153
Silent reading	127

Table 4:16 Frequently used teaching techniques

* 7 points awarded for the most frequently used technique
6 points awarded for the second most frequently used technique etc.

Even though it had been commented – in more than one of the cases – that some of the techniques were interlinked and ordered only for the sake of the question, the preference of the respondents was mainly towards story telling, big books and play.

On the contrary, the teaching techniques that were less likely to be used in the class were group reading, paired reading and silent reading respectively.

Cross tabulations were used in order to discuss the frequency with which practitioners who worked at different early years establishments used the techniques offered. Emphasis was given to the techniques that were least likely to be used. The first technique was reading schemes.

The results are presented in Table 4:17.

<i>Respondents' Workplace</i>	<i>Placement of Reading Schemes as a Teaching Technique</i>							
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	n=66
Nursery Class Attached to Primary School				50%	33.3%		16.6%	6
Nursery Class Attached to RC School				100%				1
Nursery Class Attached to CE School							100%	1
Reception Class	33.3%	11.1%		11.1%	44.4%			9
Reception Class Attached to Primary School	16.6%	16.6%	29.1%	20.8%	12.5%	4.1%		24
Reception Class Attached to RC School	16.6%	33.3%		33.3%	16.6%			6
Reception Class Attached to CE School	16.6%	16.6%	16.6%	33.3%	16.6%			6
Private Day Nursery	12.5%	12.5%		37.5%		12.5%	25%	8
Community & non-profit making Day Nursery		25%		50%			25%	4
Other		100%						1

Table 4:17 Respondents' use of reading schemes as a teaching technique

All practitioners who worked at Nursery Classes attached to RC Schools and half of those who worked at Nursery Classes attached to Primary Schools gave fourth place to reading schemes. In addition, 37.5% of the educators who worked at Private Day Nurseries were of the same opinion. This indicated relatively frequent use. On the contrary, for the practitioners who worked at Nursery Classes attached to C.E. Schools, reading schemes were the least frequently used technique.

On the other hand, the vast majority of the Reception Class teachers placed reading schemes between 1 and 4. This indicated high frequency in terms of use.

The second technique was group reading. The results are presented in Table 4:18.

<i>Respondents' Workplace</i>	<i>Placement of Group Reading as a Teaching Technique</i>							<i>n=69</i>
	<i>1</i>	<i>2</i>	<i>3</i>	<i>4</i>	<i>5</i>	<i>6</i>	<i>7</i>	
Nursery Class attached to Primary School		25%	25%	12.5%	12.5%	25%		8
Nursery Class attached to RC School					100%			2
Nursery Class attached to CE School			100%					1
Reception Class	11.1%	11.1%	44.4%	11.1%		11.1%	11.1%	9
Reception Class attached to Primary School	8.6%	4.3%	17.3%	13%	26%	26%	4.3%	23
Reception Class attached to RC School	16.6%	16.6%	33.3%		16.6%	16.6%		6
Reception Class attached to CE School		25%		25%		50%		4
Private Day Nursery	11.1%	11.1%	11.1%	11.1%	44.4%		11.1%	9
Workplace Nursery					100%			1
Community & non-profit making Day Nursery	25%			25%	50%			4
Other		50%		50%				2

Table 4:18 Respondents' use of group reading as a teaching technique

All the practitioners who worked at Nursery Classes attached to C.E. Schools regarded group reading as their third choice. 25% of the practitioners who worked at Nursery Classes attached to Primary Schools also regarded group reading as their third choice. On the contrary, for practitioners who worked at Nursery Classes attached to RC Schools group reading was ranked as a fifth choice, which suggested that it was unlikely to be used.

On the contrary, the majority of Reception Class teachers ranked group reading between 1 and 4, while overall it was not highly ranked amongst Private Day Nursery and Community and non-profit making Day Nursery practitioners.

The next technique in discussion was paired reading. In this approach Waterland (1985) suggested that 'the adult would read with the child and each would contribute to the reading from the book. There would be a gradual development from the child listening to the reading to the child reading alongside the teacher, and then the child begins to take over the reading. None of this sequence can be prescribed however, the teacher sensitive to the needs of the child, will make decisions about how the learners can be supported.' (cited in Campbell, 1990 (p.25))

The results are presented in Table 4:19.

<i>Respondents' Workplace</i>	<i>Placement of Paired Reading as a Teaching Technique</i>							
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	n=65
Nursery Class attached to Primary School				14.2%		57.1%	28.5%	7
Nursery Class attached to RC School				50%		50%		2
Nursery Class attached to CE School				100%				1
Reception Class					25%	50%	25%	8
Reception Class attached to Primary School	4.3%	4.3%	4.3%		13%	47.8%	26%	23
Reception Class attached to RC School					33.3%	33.3%	33.3%	6
Reception Class attached to CE School					25%		75%	4
Private Day Nursery			25%		25%	37.5%	12.5%	8
Community & non-profit making Day Nursery				25%	25%	25%	25%	4
Other		50%				50%		2

Table 4:19 **Respondents' use of paired reading as a teaching technique**

The vast majority of practitioners ranked paired reading between 5 and 7. Notable exceptions to the pattern were the educators who worked at Nursery Classes. 14.2% of the practitioners who worked at Nursery Classes attached to Primary Schools regarded paired reading as their fourth choice.

The percentage of those who placed paired reading as their fourth choice, increased to 50% for those who worked at Nursery Classes attached to RC Schools, and to

100% for those who worked at Nursery Classes attached to C.E. Schools. Only 4.3% of the practitioners who worked at Reception Classes as well as 25% of those who worked at Private Day Nurseries, regarded paired reading as their third option.

Finally, paired reading was first or second choice for only 4.3% of the Reception Class teachers.

The last technique in discussion was silent reading.

Campbell (1990) recognised the importance of silent reading but argued that three aspects within the organisation of sustained silent reading required careful attention. 'Time, materials and guidance.' A short, gradually lengthening amount of time linked to a natural break in the school day, a wide range of interesting and meaningful books, and guidelines, which included quietness with the teacher also reading were suggested (p.70).

The extent to which practitioners used silent reading is presented in Table 4:20.

<i>Respondents' Workplace</i>	<i>Placement of Silent Reading as a Teaching Technique</i>							
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	n=65
Nursery Class attached to Primary School					28.5%	14.2%	57.1%	7
Nursery Class attached to RC School							100%	1
Nursery Class attached to CE School					100%			1
Reception Class					12.5%	25%	62.5%	8
Reception Class attached to Primary School	4.3%				21.7%	13%	60.8%	23
Reception Class attached to RC School					20%	20%	60%	5
Reception Class attached to CE School					50%	25%	25%	4
Private Day Nursery					22.2%	22.2%	55.5%	9
Workplace Nursery				100%				1
Community & non-profit making Day Nursery		25%				50%	25%	4
Other	50%				50%			2

Table 4:20 Respondents' use of silent reading as a teaching technique

Silent reading was the least favourite technique. Nearly all the practitioners rated silent reading between 5 and 7. The exceptions of one Reception Class practitioner and a second individual who worked at a Community and non-profit making Day Nursery, who rated silent reading as their first and second choice respectively, does not change the overall negative approach.

Question 12 aimed at finding out how the practitioners divided their time during a typical Literacy lesson.

The results are presented in Table 4:21.

<i>Activity (n=86)</i>	<i>Time Divisions</i>					
	<i>Less than 10 min</i>	<i>11-25 min</i>	<i>26-40 min</i>	<i>41-50 min</i>	<i>Response Rate</i>	<i>Missing Cases</i>
Work individually	7%	4.7%	14%	8.1%	29 cases 33.7%	57 cases 66.3%
Work in groups	1.2%	5.6%	17.4%	5.8%	31 cases 36%	55 cases 64%
Work as a whole class	2.3%	14%	10.5%	14%	35 cases 40.7%	51cases 59.3%

Table 4:21 Respondents’ division of time during a literacy lesson

This was the only question in which the results presented did not represent the majority of the respondents. Instead it was the opinion of a little more than one third of the respondents. The majority of the sample either left the question unanswered, or commented that it was not applicable in a Nursery. In addition, respondents wrote that Reception Class children only followed the Literacy Hour during the summer term. Until then, the Literacy Hour was spread over the day, integrated with other activities. Children did literacy activities (mixture of independent and focused ones), working only on elements ‘in the spirit of’ without ‘formal’ structure. Moreover a sixty-minute hour did not apply in Reception Classes. The time regarded as an ‘hour’ ranged from forty-five to fifty minutes. Finally, according to comments written by the respondents, the last five minutes of every ‘hour’ in the majority of the settings were used as plenary.

More specifically thrity-two of the respondents who regarded the Literacy Hour as not applicable worked at Nurseries or Nursery Classes, Private Day Nurseries,

University/College/School Day Nurseries and one Creche. The accompanying comments were: 'not relevant', 'we do not have this format of a literacy lesson' etc.

There were also three practitioners who worked in Nurseries and instead of answering the question they commented that: 'We do not do one-hour Literacy, children constantly work with literature.' 'Not applicable for N/R until term three, we do not have literacy lessons.' 'The children spend 50% of the time working individually, 40% working in groups and 10% working as a whole class. The whole session lasts 2 hours 30 minutes.'

In addition, one practitioner who worked in a Community and non-profit making Day Nursery wrote that children worked in groups all the time. Furthermore, one person who worked in a Private Day Nursery wrote that the children worked either in groups or individually without specifying the time spent in each situation.

Finally only four practitioners who actually answered the question and represented through percentages how a typical one-hour's literacy lesson was spent worked in Nurseries. Two of them worked in Private Day Nurseries, one in a Workplace Nursery and the last one in a Community and non-profit making Day Nursery. On this understanding the percentages presented above reflected mainly the perceptions of Reception Class teachers.

Despite the fact that the framework for Literacy in Reception Classes is suggested by the National Literacy Strategy, nine Reception teachers wrote comments such as, 'We don't do Literacy Hour', or 'Literacy Hour does not exist as such in early years', and a further four either did not answer the question or wrote 'Not applicable'.

Three respondents, instead of answering the question wrote comments such as: 'In Reception the "Literacy Hour" is split through the day', or 'Children do not work for an hour at Foundation Stage'. This practitioner suggested ten minutes work in groups and fifteen minutes as a whole class.

One respondent offered her approach to literacy teaching when she said that: 'We do not do a Literacy Hour. They have a literacy experience every day'. She then suggested that 'children work twenty minutes as a group'.

Three teachers did write comments that suggested they were working towards the Literacy Hour, such as, 'At this time of year we do not do a full hour of literacy. They may work about 10-15 minutes as a whole class and then about 20 minutes individually.' Also, 'As a YR class we only gradually implement elements of the Literacy Hour. In the summer term we prepare for Y1 with a more typical hour of Literacy lesson. We typically have a 15-minute whole-class intro, then groups working on a focus activity with play happening as well.' Another comment was,

‘We have 15 minutes in groups and 25 minutes as a whole class. Not currently teaching literacy lessons as such – these take place in the summer term.’

Question 13, presented the respondents with a set of factors that may influence their teaching practice.

The results are presented in Table 4:22.

<i>Influencing Factors (n=86)</i>	<i>Level of Influence</i>					
	<i>Strong Influence</i>	<i>Significant Influence</i>	<i>Little Influence</i>	<i>No Influence at all</i>	<i>Do not know / Cannot tell</i>	<i>Missing Cases</i>
Early Learning Goals	59.3%	32.6%	5.8%		1.2%	1=1.2%
National Curriculum	20.9%	43%	20.9%	5.8%	1.2%	7=8.1%
School policy	40.7%	46.5%	3.5%		2.3%	6=7%
Head’s views	24.4%	43%	18.6%		3.5%	9=10.5%
Colleagues’ Views	19.8%	52.3%	17.4%		3.5%	6=7%
Parents’ views	7%	46.5%	30.2%	4.7%	3.5%	7=8.1%
Personal beliefs	57%	32.6%	4.7%		1.2%	4=4.7%

Table 4:22 Factors that may influence teaching practice

When seventy-seven of the respondents (89.6%) decided that their own beliefs about teaching reading had the greatest influence on their teaching practice, it can be argued that it has been made obvious once again that the real question is not *if* beliefs influence teaching practice but in what way they do so.

It is worth mentioning though that there were four people (4.7%) for whom their own beliefs were of little significance regarding their teaching.

Given that the Curriculum for the Foundation Stage was not yet in effect nearly all the sample members acknowledged that Early Learning Goals (QCA 1999) was a document that influenced their teaching either strongly or significantly (seventy-nine of the respondents, 91.9%).

A third core source of influence for 87.2% (seventy- five cases) was the policy of the school. As for the remaining statements at a first glance the level of agreement was once again high but at the same time there were signs of differing opinion. The rate of disagreement increased significantly, along with the non-response rate, when it came to comment on colleagues', heads' and parents' views respectively.

With regards to colleagues' views, Helsby (1999) pointed out that collaboration between teachers can potentially be an empowering experience drawing upon shared thinking and alternative ideas and widen the range of possible solutions teachers may adopt in response to a chance. However, fifteen of the respondents (17.4%) thought that their colleagues' views had little influence on their practice. The role of the head or manager of the Nursery changed depending on the nature of the establishment.

The limitations existing within the head teacher's/manager's role was perhaps part of the explanation of why 18.6% (sixteen cases) regarded the views of their head as of little relevance to their teaching.

With regards to parents, QCA (2000) not only recognised them as first and most enduring educators of the children, but also suggested a number of ways of achieving partnership between parents and early years practitioners – something that is regarded as a common feature of effective practice.

All these seem to be ignored by the thirty respondents (34.9%) who were of the opinion that parents' views bear little or no significance to their practice.

Finally the National Curriculum (emphasis on the Literacy Hour within which the teaching of reading takes place) had significant influence on the teaching of 63.9% (fifty-five cases). This can be considered as expected given that almost all the sample members gave preference to Early Learning Goals (QCA 1999) as well as that the number of Reception Class teachers who participated in the survey and expected to use National Curriculum was forty-five.

In Question 14 the respondents were asked what might lead to a change in their practice.

The results are presented in Table 4:23.

Possible Factors (n=86)	Level of Influence					
	Strong Influence	Significant Influence	Little Influence	No Influence at all	Do not know / Cannot tell	Miss- ing Cases
A change imposed by the Government	37.2%	43%	8.1%	1.2%	2.3%	7=8.1%
Respondent's own understanding of the positive effect a new practice has on the class	76.7%	18.6%			1.2%	3=3.5%
Colleagues' suggestions	17.4%	59.3%	14%	1.2%	2.5%	5=5.8%

Table 4:23 **Factors that may lead to change of practice**

The fact that all but one respondent (95.3%) argued that their own understanding of the positive effect of a new practice on the class is the key element for a change in teaching practice, reconfirmed that ‘the extent to which teachers adopt new instructional practices in their classrooms, relates closely to the degree of alignment between their personal beliefs and the assumptions underlying particular innovatory programs or methods’. (Medwell, Wray, Poulson and Fox, 1998 (p.25))

With a significantly lower rate of agreement compared to the above statement, but still with a high percentage of agreement (80.2%, sixty-nine cases), it was argued that Government imposed change might lead to a change of practice.

Colleagues’ suggestions were the final parameter that this question addressed as possible to lead educators to a change of practice. Sixty-six of the respondents (76.7%) agreed that colleagues’ suggestions might lead to a change of practice.

But at the same time, in summarising Lortie’s (1975) work, Hargreaves (1989) claimed that, ‘teachers avoid long-term planning and collaboration with their colleagues and resist involvement in whole-school policy-making, in favour of gaining marginal improvements in time and resources to make their own classroom work easier’. (p.54) Perhaps this was the way of thinking for thirteen of the respondents (15.2%) who argued that colleagues’ suggestions bore little or no influence on their practice.

In Question 15 the respondents were asked which Government document they used most frequently to plan their teaching.

The results are presented in Table 4:24.

<i>Government Document</i>	<i>Percentage of Respondents Favouring the Document (n=86)</i>
Early Learning Goals	64%
National Literacy Strategy	18.6%
School Scheme	9.3%
National Curriculum	1.2%
Other	3.5%

Table 4:24 Means of planning the teaching of reading
(Missing cases 3 = 3.5%)

Given that the Foundation Stage Curriculum was not yet in effect when the research was conducted, respondents reconfirmed their preference for Early Learning Goals (QCA 1999) (fifty-five cases, 64%).

The document that was next most likely to be used as a planning aid was the National Literacy Strategy (DfES 1998). The difference in the percentages (18.6%, sixteen cases) was to a certain extent expected since the National Literacy Strategy (DfES 1998) is supposed to be used only towards the end of the Reception Year in order to offer a smooth transition to the National Curriculum (DfES 2000). In addition, the Early Learning Goals (QCA 1999) provide links towards the National Literacy Strategy (DfES 1998) by giving the opportunity to work on some of its elements. Perhaps these were some of the reasons why only eight people (9.3%) used reading schemes as their main source for planning.

In fourteen cases (16.2%), even though there was a single preference, mainly either the National Literacy Strategy (DfES 1998) or the Early Learning Goals (QCA 1999), indicated by the respondents, additional comments were written that expressed a slight difference of opinion compared to their initial statement.

It was written that, 'Early Learning Goals and National Literacy Strategy cannot be divided', and in another case the respondent specified that she used 'Early Learning Goals for Nursery and National Literacy Strategy for Reception'. The option that 'a combination of Early Learning Goals and National Literacy Strategy followed by the

school scheme and commercially produced materials' was also suggested. Finally, one person gave preference to Early Learning Goals (QCA 1999) but also added Curriculum Guidance for the Foundation Stage (QCA 2000).

The variety of opinions presented above implies that the statutory demands are guides for planning rather than complete curriculum documents. In addition, (especially since the importance of the 'norm' is in most cases acknowledged) the variety in opinions may be considered as a sign of 'differentiation' in terms of methodological reflections in order to respond better towards the individual needs of the children.

In the next two questions (16 and 17) the respondents were presented with a list of possible factors that may become sources of difficulty and of improvement respectively in terms of their teaching of reading.

The results are presented in Tables 4:25 and 4:26 respectively.

<i>Source of Difficulty</i>	<i>Respondents' Opinion (n=86)</i>	
	<i>Yes</i>	<i>No</i>
Many topics to cover in order to deal with National Curriculum demands	39.5%	60.5%
Large number of pupils in the class	60.5%	39.5%
Frequent changes imposed by the Government	51.2%	48.8%
Children's home background	67.4%	32.6%
Lack of time	64%	36%
Lack of resources	39.5%	60.5%
Lack of teacher knowledge	25.6%	74.4%
Lack of motivation	14%	86%

Table 4:25 Sources of difficulty in the teaching of reading

<i>Source of Improvement</i>	<i>Respondents' Opinion (n=86)</i>	
	<i>Yes</i>	<i>No</i>
Co-operation between teachers	44.2%	55.8%
In-service training	61.6%	38.4%
Parental involvement	68.6%	31.4%
Quality of resources	61.6%	38.4%
Clear school policy	43%	57%
More time for reading	55.8%	44.2%
Smaller class size	70.9%	29.1%
Quality of resources	47.7%	52.3%

Table 4:26 Sources of improvement in the teaching of reading

From the way the respondents answered, it seems that all the factors listed in both questions had significant influence upon their teaching of reading.

Children's home background was regarded as the *most* significant source of difficulty upon teaching by 67.4% of the sample. In addition, sixty-five cases (64%) noted lack of time as the second most significant source of difficulty. The respondents themselves gave possible answers to the above problems when they stated that improvement in the teaching of reading might come as a result of more parental involvement (68.6%, fifty-nine cases) and smaller class size (70.9%, sixty-nine cases). Finally, respondents recognised the need for in-service training, when 61.6% (fifty-three cases) agreed that it could improve their practice.

In an attempt to enhance validity, two open-ended questions were used. In Question 18, the respondents were asked to describe and state the aims of one activity that exemplified their approach to teaching reading.

Of the eighty-six respondents only fifty-three answered the question (66.2% response rate). More than half of them (thirty-one cases) were Reception Class teachers. In order to analyse these responses the following procedures were adopted:

- a) All the responses were typed out for analysis.
- b) The responses were read and sorted into categories.
- c) The categories were analysed in terms of setting type.

The categories used to analyse the responses were:

- a) Responses which regarded reading as exploration and experimentation with sounds, words and text (i.e. linking sounds - initial and final - with letters, naming and sounding the letters of the alphabet, word recognition, phonic games).
- b) Responses that regarded reading as fun.
- c) Responses which identified reading as a means of giving opportunities to share and enjoy a wide range of stories, rhymes, music and songs (i.e. story telling, rhymes, role-play).
- d) Responses that considered reading as a tool for thinking (i.e. to show an understanding of elements of stories such as the main character, sequence of events, openings and how information can be found in non-fiction texts to answer questions about where, who, why and how).
- e) Responses that regarded reading as a means of vocabulary extension.
- f) Responses where the aim was to focus on pre-reading skills.
- g) Non-categorised responses (see Appendices).

The categories were based on the Early Learning Goals that children have to reach by the end of the Foundation Stage in the communication, language and literacy area of learning (QCA 2000).

There were three categories in which the vast majority of the responses came from Reception Class teachers.

The first category was labelled: 'Experimentation with sounds, words and text'. Reception Class teachers preferred phonic games that aim at enabling children to recognise initial letter sounds or hear phonemes in initial, middle and end positions. In two cases they used the Letterland and Oxford Reading Tree schemes in order to achieve the above aim. Also in one case, alongside the development of the initial sounds, the teacher aimed at promoting the use of picture/word cues when reading.

On the one hand, nursery nurses who worked at Private Day Nurseries used reading schemes (Letterland, Oxford Reading Tree and Finger Phonics), role-play and reading aloud to the children in order to help them gain knowledge of letter sounds and aid reading and language skills. On the other hand, Nursery Class teachers preferred the use of big book group sessions, phonic games (alphabet bingo, taking home letter tins with a letter shape in), and nursery rhymes. The aims set in these cases were to help children identify alphabet letters and sounds, initial letter sounds, and following the print from left to right.

The next category was labelled: 'Reading: a tool for thinking'. In this case, a variety of aims appeared, even though the range of the activities used was very limited. Specifically the suggested aims were the following: recognition of key words, understanding of the format of a book and how it works, capital letters and punctuation, looking at picture clues to predict and finally reading sentences. In five Reception Classes, as well as in three out of four Nurseries, the teachers chose 'shared reading' as a technique towards text level work. They used big book stories

followed by comprehension questions and use of the pictures in order to re-tell the story. In addition, shared write-up aiming at creating a class story that was going to be typed in a book format, and guided reading was also suggested by the practitioners as alternative ways of achieving reading comprehension.

The third category was labelled: 'Reading as vocabulary extension'. Reception Class teachers suggested guided reading as a suitable technique for developing vocabulary. Guided reading sessions focusing on high frequency words or the development of sight vocabulary were the activities that practitioners chose. Finally, reading in small groups with a focus on the key words of the story, as well as matching words or letters to written sentences, were also considered as effective vocabulary extension activities.

The next category was labelled: 'Reading is fun' on the basis that all the activities included aim at fostering a delight in books. The techniques chosen to increase the children's confidence and enjoyment of reading were the following:

- a) 'The bear hunt' role-play.
- b) Reading a class favourite text/story.
- c) The use of big books.
- d) Allowing the children to choose themselves what to read from a variety of books.

The fifth category was labelled: 'Reading as enjoyment of stories and rhymes'. The main technique used in this case was story telling accompanied by role-play.

The chosen activities were similar. The Reception Class teachers preferred rhyming CVCs, fantastic approach to reading though story sacks, and stories that lead to rhyme making. Contrary to that, practitioners in Nursery settings used role-play and story boards that help children to express ideas towards story telling.

The last category was labelled: 'Focusing on pre-reading skills'. In this case it was commented that children were prepared for pre-school reading through book/story sharing and re-telling.

Finally, there were three non-categorised responses. Two of them came from Reception Classes. In the first case, the respondent was unwilling to give an example of only one activity on the basis that children need a variety of strategies. As for the second case, the comment made explained that the setting was organised in a way that facilitated the teaching of reading, instead of exemplifying the teaching of reading through an activity. The remaining response came from a Private Day Nursery but the handwriting was not legible.

The last question (19) gave the respondents the chance to add any further comments they wanted with regards to the questionnaire. From these responses it seems that there were two attitudes towards the teaching of reading depending on the kind of qualifications the practitioner held and the setting in which s/he worked.

On the one hand, practitioners who worked in Private Day Nurseries or Day Care Centres felt uncomfortable with the teaching of reading. Specifically it was argued:

‘I have been teaching reading to three and four-year-olds for the last sixteen years. The children seem to become confident readers but I have no training at all in this field and no in-service training is ever offered to nursery nurses for teaching reading. I often think there must be an awful lot I do not know.’

In another case, one respondent claimed that: ‘It is difficult to teach Literacy in the early years as NNEB’s are expected to, overnight, teach children reading and language as if we were qualified Primary School teachers. We have few courses that we can attend to remedy that.’ The above comments allow suggesting that nursery nurses do not regard themselves as teachers. One sample member argued that: ‘Even though we are not teachers we are OFSTED inspected and follow the Early Learning Goals linked to the Foundation Stage’. Finally, it must be mentioned that in three cases practitioners who worked in Private Day Nurseries when asked to rate their confidence in teaching reading, commented that ‘teaching reading is not a requirement for the job’.

On the contrary, practitioners who worked at Nursery Schools or Reception Classes regarded themselves as teachers, but practitioners also mentioned that: ‘At the present we are in a dilemma because the National Literacy Strategy Team are telling us to do formal phonics teaching and whole-class activities, and the Early Years Team are telling us that we should be taking a much less formal approach with lots of child-centred activities and autonomy on the part of the children’.

They also recognised that Early Learning Goals (QCA 1999) offered the guidelines in planning and assessment as well as the importance of assessment in teaching, when they commented that 'regular assessment means achievement'. But at the same time they argued that 'the amount of different guidance (Early Learning Goals, National Curriculum, National Literacy Strategy, and Coventry LEA materials) is unhelpful because you have to trawl through all of them and it hinders communication between colleagues'.

On this line of argument they commented that 'Literacy Hour is not strictly enforced but they do literacy activities all day especially when the Nursery and Reception Class children are integrated'. But they also specified that 'Reception Class children have a Numeracy and a Literacy activity daily that allows the teaching of reading'.

Finally in two cases, practitioners who worked at Reception Classes acknowledged the importance of the National Literacy Strategy and Coventry Baseline Assessment respectively. They claimed that 'both approaches to teaching offer a clear initial point for the reader'. According to these two teachers 'the implementation of the National Literacy Strategy had a marked effect in raising reading standards'.

A final issue that arose from the respondents concerned the attitude of Nursery practitioners towards the Literacy Hour. Practitioners who worked in Nursery Classes as well as Private Day Nurseries and Day Care Centres argued that: 'Children that are in the Nursery do not follow the Literacy Hour but they do work

“in the spirit of” it’. Practitioners worked on the basis of sound planning and took different approaches to teaching reading. Practitioners/teachers ‘use various pathways of finding cues, teaching phonics, looking at pictures and initial letters of words all of which encourage children to find their own ways of decoding’.

Finally practitioners commented that ‘National Literacy Strategy and subsequently the Literacy Hour are not statutory until Y1’. On these grounds, ‘only the eldest children in the Nursery setting are prepared for pre-school reading, something that is optional and happens with parental consent’. At the same time, Nursery practitioners argued that they ‘do not teach reading in a formal way but mainly do activities that promote pre-reading skills such as listening, speaking and sequencing’. As a result ‘almost all the time children work on some aspect of language development’.

4:2 Summary of the findings

The survey conducted in the early years settings in the Coventry and Birmingham areas resulted in a number of findings that can be summarised as follows:

- 88.6% of the respondents felt confident about teaching reading.
- Practitioners’ first priority was to enable children to integrate skills in order to extract meaning from a text.
- Phonics was the most important way of helping children to learn to read for 72.5% of the sample.

- Direct teaching of phonics was regarded as necessary for teaching reading for 86% of the respondents.
- Almost unanimously, knowledge of letters and sounds was regarded as the key skill in learning to read (99.8%).
- With regard to whether or not there is a fixed sequence of reading activities for the children to follow, the sample was almost equally divided.
- Methods of teaching reading should be subject to whole-school decision-making according to 70.9% of the sample.
- It was argued almost unanimously (90.7%) that teachers' beliefs should be taken into account when decisions are made by the authorities about reading.
- Early Learning Goals (QCA 1999) was a useful document for planning teaching for 89.5% of the sample.
- Story telling and big books were the two most frequently used teaching techniques.
- On the contrary, paired reading and silent reading were the least likely techniques to be used.
- For 66.3% of the sample, the Literacy Hour was not applicable to the early years settings.
- The Early Learning Goals (QCA 1999) and the school policy were regarded as the main factors that influenced teaching practice (91.9% and 87.2% respectively).
- The understanding from the practitioners' side of the positive effect of a new practice on the class is what might lead them to a change of practice (95.3%).

- The Early Learning Goals (QCA 1999) was the most frequently used document for planning the teaching of reading for 64% of the respondents.
- Children's home background and lack of time were regarded as the main sources of difficulty to the teaching of reading (60.9% and 67.4% respectively).
- On the contrary, smaller class size and more parental involvement was what the respondents suggested as steps towards improvement in teaching practice (70.9% and 67.4% respectively).
- When practitioners were asked to provide an activity that exemplified their approach to teaching reading, Reception Class teachers suggested that one way in which children can experiment with sounds, words and texts was to use phonic games that lead to knowledge and understanding of initial letter sounds.
- Contrary to that, the practitioners who worked in Nurseries argued that experimentation with sounds, words and texts leads to helping children identify alphabet letters and sounds, initial letter sounds, and following the print from left to right. On this basis they were in favour of the use of big book sessions and nursery rhymes.
- Reception Class teachers regarded rhyming CVCs, fantastic approach to reading through story sacks, and stories that lead to rhyme-making as activities that foster the enjoyment of stories.
- On the other hand, role-play and the use of storyboards was what practitioners who work in Nurseries suggested as effective for the enjoyment of stories.
- Role-play and story telling were two techniques that facilitate the enjoyment of reading.

- Shared reading was thought of as a provoking way of teaching reading.
- Guided reading and the building up of sight vocabulary were the techniques favoured by the Reception Class teachers as helpful towards vocabulary extension.
- Nursery practitioners instead focused on the recognition of the key words of the text.
- Pre-reading skills were regarded as part of the teaching of reading for the Nursery Class teachers.

This chapter of the study aimed at presenting the findings of the school-focused research project that explored how early years practitioners experience the interplay between theory and practice in the context of teaching reading.

This study subscribes to the view that principles are important because they form the basis of our thinking and practice. As Drummond (1993) wrote, ‘good pre-school and primary practice must be built on a solid foundation of both conviction and rationale’. (p.111) The above quote indicates that personal beliefs are only the first part of the equation. In order to become principles, beliefs have to be supported by evidence from the research and theory in early childhood education.

A principle is, according to Longman (1978), a general truth or belief that is used as a base for reasoning or action, or for the development of further ideas (cited in Miller, 1995 (p.11)). Principles are concerned with what we believe and must underpin everything we do. This seems obvious and yet many early years

practitioners, according to Miller (1995), 'find it difficult to talk about what they believe. If asked to write down their principles they frequently write down what they do, rather than what they believe.' (p.11)

In this study early years practitioners were very firm on conviction – they stated × clearly what works in the class – but they found it very difficult to explain why. 'Values underpin everything and vision is a healthy catalyst for change. It is important that early childhood educators are supported in the articulation and appreciation of their own vision of early experiences for children. Such vision derives from the values they hold and their own constructions of childhood.' (Nutbrown, 2001 (p.71)) Reflecting on this the next section of this chapter will present the interview findings in order to unfold the rationale behind those practices.

4:3 Presentation of the interview findings

Nine interviews were conducted during the winter of 2000 in the Coventry area. Every time an interview was conducted the interviewees suggested that reading was a huge topic to discuss. Because of this, all the participants asked the researcher to explain what her expectations were. As a result, in every visit before the interview was conducted the questions were set in a very clear and specific context. In most cases the interviewees gave general answers and the researcher had to probe and ask a further question in order to push teachers along the content of the initial question.

On this understanding Question One asked the practitioners what a child should know by the end of his/her year in the setting, with regards to reading. This question had been designed to provide information about teachers' aims underpinning their teaching of reading. The purpose of this question was to find out whether practitioners had a clear viewpoint on what their role involved in teaching reading.

Respondents in Private Day Nurseries as well as practitioners in Nursery Classes attached to Primary Schools appeared to feel obliged to provide learning opportunities for children to develop an understanding that print conveys meaning and, in English, is read from left to right and top to bottom. Children should also become aware of ways in which information can be found in texts. These are regarded as goals to be achieved in terms of language and literacy according to the Desirable Outcomes for Children's Learning (QCA 1996), which in turn was one of the key documents used by the participants in this study.

Specifically they argued the following:

'Basically we have an aim set up for our children that by the time they leave here we want them to be able to achieve certain goals in language and literacy; in that respect we don't expect them to learn to actually read words but to recognise that when we open the books the writings have a meaning and it tells them a story, that they are able to open a book and actually look at the bottom of the page, or point the

writing out, recognising their name, that is the first sign of reading. To be able to recognise simple things like “Safeways”, “McDonalds” or the name of their favourite chocolate bar or a packet of crisps. Everyday things, that is how they start to learn how to recognise letters and familiar words.’

Research indicates that a child’s ability to write his or her own name and knowledge of the alphabet can be considered as indicators of future success in reading and writing (Riley, 1996). Writing their own names and naming and sounding letters of the alphabet were subsequently included in the Curriculum Guidance as goals for Reception Class children (QCA 2000, p.64 and p.60 respectively). In the same line of argument participants in this study included helping children identify letters in an enjoyable activity as they acquired the broader concepts about print and books, and using the children’s names as a focus when considering the alphabet in their teaching priorities. The following quote from one interview clearly illustrates the ideas suggested above.

‘I would say there are specific things they need to know. For instance basic alphabet, basic letter formation, reading a text from left to right, appreciating that they could look at a picture in a book and make their story up from the picture, they don’t necessarily have to read the text.’

The Desirable Outcomes for children's learning (QCA 1996) state that practitioners should provide 'an educational programme which responds to individual needs'. (p.1) The ability to meet the diverse needs of children through differentiation was considered to be one of the principles for early years education and was subsequently included in the Curriculum Guidance for the Foundation Stage (QCA 2000). In this case, participants claimed that they had to respect the pace and the background of the individual child. And if awareness means being able to 'attend to something, act upon it or work with it' as Clay (1998) (p.42) suggested, then teachers have to draw children's attention to print and help them associate it with their own ideas and experiences. Through interaction with teachers and other adults children begin to understand the various functions that print serves in their cultures, what children need to 'be sufficiently aware of the acts that will extract the messages from print'. (Clay, 1998 (p.50))

More specifically:

'So our main aim in the Nursery is to extend each child individually at the level they are at. Children who have had no experience of books need to spend several months just being read to, looking at books by themselves, having experience of books being left around in the Nursery for them to look at. Children who have already had lots of stories at home are much more ready to look at the more formal aspects of the book. We look at how a book is organised: the cover,

the title, the author, the illustrator, where you start to read. As adults we tend to think it is automatic that you start at the left and read to the right. Small children don't.'

Boys (2002) suggested that, 'during story time the emphasis of the lesson should be placed on enjoyment and a sense of shared participation. When appropriate books are chosen, story time can be an opportunity to engage children's concentration and listening skills.' (p.91) The Reception Class teachers in this study seemed to be in agreement with Boys' ideas since they emphasised the need for children to enjoy reading as well as the importance of understanding how a book is organised. In this case practitioners claimed:

'Really we want them first of all to just enjoy stories. Our first step is to actually get them to talk about the pictures and stories. Their first Stage One books don't have words because we just want them to get to know how to use a book. The most important thing is that they can follow and turn the pages one by one; they understand a book is pointing this way up not upside down. It is getting them to understand you read it from page to page; you don't start at the back, you start in the right way.'

The National Literacy Strategy, which was outlined in the Framework for Teaching (DfES 1998) document, has given rise to the Literacy Hour. The document sets out

the teaching objectives in Literacy for pupils from Reception Year to Year 6. Letter and name recognition and high frequency words are some of the teaching objectives – included in the Framework for Teaching (DfES 1998) – which these Reception Class teachers felt obliged to meet in the form of attainment targets. The following interview quotes reflect this.

‘Well they should know all the sounds of all the letters of the alphabet, all the individual sounds. The more able children will be able to blend sounds together. I think all the children should be able to build simple words, simple phonic words, for instance ‘yes’ and ‘stop’, and the majority of them, I think, should have a good basic word vocabulary, sight vocabulary, and be able to read books.’

‘They are able to identify their own name, their Christian name. Some of them can now write their own name and associate the sound at the beginning of their name with a representation of that sound. So if the child looks at the letter A and their name begins with that sound, they are able to put the two together – the name and the sound. Also this past few months we have been looking at words from the first books that they will read when they move to the next class. So they are able to identify between three and five words: look, in, here, yes, no.’

Question Two asked practitioners what they as individuals thought was appropriate for the child to know by the end of his/her year in terms of reading. The aim behind the question was to make practitioners express their own understandings and beliefs regarding what is suitable to expect the child to know by the end of his/her year at their establishment.

Respondents in Private Day Nurseries as well as practitioners in Nursery Classes attached to Primary Schools, seemed to support creating 'opportunities' through which reading was going to be introduced to the children. They used play as a means of creating those opportunities with respect for the pace of the individual child. Hall (1991) suggested that, 'Play provides a context within which the emergence of literacy can be manifested and explored. Teachers who provide literacy-rich play opportunities give children opportunities to demonstrate what they know, are able to observe literacy behaviour in the widest possible contexts, offer the children maximum opportunity to explore new ways of representing meanings and using literacy, and facilitate the natural emergence of literacy.' (pp.20-21) The following quote reflects these views.

'I think that our job is to give them the opportunity to learn. I think they are all able to read eventually, maybe some better than others, but they all get there in the end and as a Nursery our job is to provide opportunities and experiences so that this [reading] can be introduced to them. And so they have some sort of knowledge, so when they go

to school it is not a new thing to them, they can look back and recall, “I can remember doing this at the Nursery”. Our basic curriculum is not targeted like in a school in their stepping stone goals. There are goals that we want the children to reach. Whether they reach them or not is not the point. As long as we can help them and see them through it, providing evidence that we are doing these activities so that they can achieve this.’

(Private Day Nursery practitioner)

Roberts (1999) approached reading as something more than a process of recognition. He argued that reading is the result of ‘the utilisation of a variety of cues from which meaningful thoughts emerge. Children should be taught to adopt a searching strategy in their approach to word recognition and in their interpretation of a text.’ (p.4) Thus teachers have to help children use certain forms of behaviour when they are learning to read: associative, which enables children to match print with meaning and letters and involves amounts of letters eventually to a full abstract code, and searching behaviour that ‘allows children to use their knowledge of letter-sound correspondences, and their increasing awareness of the spelling patterns and pronounceable syllables that form the basis of word recognition in reading to search for appropriate responses to unfamiliar words. Both these forms of behaviour involve experimentation and flexibility from the part of the learner and the teacher is expected to show children how to arrive at a decision.’ (p.5) The following quote reflects this.

‘All around you see lots of print in the Nursery presented in different ways, some computer generated, some cut out, some different fonts of handwriting. So there is print all around the Nursery for them to be aware of. And their attention is drawn to the print when they are choosing objects from around the room. Everything is labelled, there is print everywhere for everything, for all their toys, everything is labelled clearly with a picture. So they get a picture representation and then the word. For instance, if it is building bricks they get a picture of a brick and then building bricks next door. All their work is named so when they do work everything has their name on it and they put it in their own tray and they are encouraged to go and find that again.’

(Nursery Class attached to a Primary School practitioner)

Sponseller (1982) suggested that for teachers, the significance of research on play ‘is that it allows them to adopt an organising schema through which to view children’s play. The meaningfulness of this research for teachers is its potential to assist them in forming their own questions about the play of the children they teach. To translate research into practice teachers need to decide on their goals for play facilitation: the types of play they wish to encourage and the developmental and/or learning process they wish to influence. They also need to become researchers themselves in the sense that they should monitor the effect on children of whatever tactic they implement.’ (p.231) The priorities of the educators in Reception Classes were

significantly different. What they regarded as appropriate was to help children become confident readers. They emphasised the teaching of phonics. They chose a learning-through-play approach and their choices were in line with the suggestions made in the National Literacy Strategy (DfES 1998) under the headings of word and text level work respectively. This is reflected in the following quote.

‘I will do different games. I might do some games with them to do with phonics and sounds or we might be doing some writing on the board together. In our first half an hour of the lesson there will be part of it where I will be reading with them or writing with them and then the next part of it where we will be doing something to do with word level work, which is to do with phonics or words/things that they might know, so that the reading part aspect of it is there.’

(Reception Class teacher)

Question Three asked practitioners if they follow a certain routine every day in teaching reading. This question aimed at discussing two issues: a) if practitioners followed a specific routine every day in the teaching of reading and correspondingly discuss their approach in planning, and b) the nature of the activities offered to the children. In this case different methods of teaching were selected by the practitioners in the three kinds of settings included in the research.

Private Day Nursery practitioners seemed to choose a topic, which was used as a peg on which to hang the chosen learning outcomes. This, according to Jameson and Watson (1998), is a widely held approach regarding planning. Commenting on the activities that were offered to the children, it can be argued that practitioners viewed becoming literate as a process whereby children's grasp of literacy develops with purposeful encounters with reading and writing. Reading and writing in Private Day Nurseries were regarded as interrelated and developed together when they were part of children's play and other activities. This is reflected in the following quote.

'Each time we concentrate on a topic, and out of that topic we are going to talk about literacy and numeracy, personal skills, knowledge and understanding of the world. All the six key areas of that document will be incorporated into the topic.'

Findings from research and development projects such as Principles into Practice (Blenkin et al., 1997) and Quality and Diversity (ECEC 1997) indicated that those who work in the maintained private and voluntary sectors agree that play is a developmentally appropriate strategy essential to the early years curriculum. Children interact with print during the process of their play if it is made available to them through materials and demonstrations by others. Literacy development is enhanced towards successful achievement through planned interaction. This is what is meant by 'literacy events' (David et al., 2000). Teachers create and engage children in literacy events where they use the language of print and help children to

use visual and auditory strategies. Through play children encounter and explore reading and writing and develop strategies for incorporating the learning into their own understandings. The following quote reflects this.

‘Yes, they have structured things each day such as story time, choosing books from the shelf, looking at books by themselves, singing songs, learning the alphabet. Every Monday they have a little news book and that has to do with talking about past experiences and then they draw their own little picture in a book and then they write underneath it. And then they help us to spell out the different words and so on and so forth. Every day the children write their own names and we always start any writing they do from left to right so they understand that that is the way when they start reading. Maybe the things that children do every day seem very structured but they also get freedom to choose books.’

In the Curriculum Guidance for the Foundation Stage (DfES/QCA 2000) it is stated that play environments should be used to provide the basis for instructive learning. The most effective pedagogy includes interaction associated with the term ‘teaching and provision of instructive learning environments’ that extend children’s thinking. Private Day Nursery and Nursery Class practitioners seemed to be against systematic and explicit instruction with regards to reading. Instead they preferred to offer children literacy resources that in time children will incorporate into their play.

The aim was to expand children's interest in literacy rather than teaching them to read. They seemed to be of the opinion that in pre-school 'literacy events may be planned to stimulate and take advantage of teachable moments that will emerge from daily experiences'. (David et al., 2000 (p.46)) This is reflected in the following comment.

'Nursery is a lot of the day the children's free choice of activities. The activities are set out and staff will go round and sit with them at activities and actually extend each individual child where they are. But they also have a twenty-minute to half an hour session in the middle of the morning or the middle of the afternoon where there is a structured teaching point each day. It is not always literacy. At that point when we are doing literacy we will look at a big book all together.'

(Participant who worked in a Nursery Class
attached to a Primary School)

Reception Class teachers emphasised letter and word recognition, but they also brought to the foreground the importance of monitoring. Riley (1996) suggested that the main reasons for regular monitoring may include: 'establish what each individual can do; identify what strategies a child is using; assess individual stage and rate of development; and enable the teacher to provide appropriately for the individual'.

(p.59) Reception Class teachers emphasised word and letter recognition through the teaching of phonics. This is reflected below.

‘Well really each child is different, so one child might be better with just actually sight reading words, so they might recognise “the” straightaway, or they might recognise “a” straightaway, or other children might have to use the phonic approach. And every day we use phonics and teach them how to use phonics. Phonics is just letter sounds and we learn different letter sounds. They have a phonic book. Let me show you their phonic book.’

The second issue addressed in this question was the nature of the activities through which children were introduced to reading. Practitioners who worked in Private Day Nurseries and Nursery Classes attached to Primary Schools, as well as Reception Class teachers, complied with the notion that any form of literacy behaviour before the age of five is simply pre-reading rather than appropriate reading activity for that age and stage of development.

One strategy that readers need explicit knowledge of is, according to Boys (2002), grapho-phonetic cueing. Once children begin to develop an awareness of sound-symbol relationships, they will attempt to use it if they are encouraged and supported. In order to promote the use of this strategy a practitioner needs access to good quality texts. In the list of characteristics that should be used to help the

selection of appropriate books Boys (2002) included: a meaningful and enjoyable text; a predictable story line; illustrations that support the text. (p.93) These suggestions are clearly reflected in the following quote.

‘Like looking at pictures and talking about the pictures and asking the child what is happening in this picture, what they think is happening in that. That is one way of starting it and we also do recognising letters a, b, c, that is a form of reading – matching letters.’

(Private Day Nursery Practitioner)

Holdaway (1979) wrote of how ‘children not thoroughly familiar with the syntactic patterns, idioms and tunes of written English... require the joyful repetition of a rich literature through the ear and across the tongue...[so that] the patterns of the book dialect are running through the automatic language system of the child’. (p.194) Moreover, shared reading, as suggested by Roberts (1999), ‘creates a warm participatory enjoyment of a literary pursuit’. (p.22) It provides opportunities to teachers to react to stories and comment upon various aspects of a text, such as new words and phrases, descriptions, the events in a story, and periodically to draw comparisons between the current and previously read stories. Books that are used for shared reading need, according to Bruce (2001), to:

- contain language suited to being read aloud
- encourage prediction
- encourage response

- have a clear narrative structure
- include illustrations that support the narrative
- refer to situations with which readers can empathise and
- contain text which has rhyme, rhythm and repetition. (p.44)

Finally, the communication language and literacy goals for the end of the Foundation Stage (QCA 2000) include enjoyment of narrative, story, poetry and music, and active experimentation with sounds, words and texts. These activities have also been called by Whitehead (2002), 'playing with sounds and sense and learning to love language'. (p. 40) The following quote from a practitioner who worked in a Nursey Class attached to a Primary School reflects this.

'Sometimes we also have a much more structured literacy session where a member of staff will sit with a big book and a book stand and we will actually very deliberately look at it – is the book the right way up, this is the cover, this is the author, this is the illustrator. The author is the person who writes the story; the illustrator is the person who draws the pictures for the story. When we do start to read, the adult will actually model the process of reading by following the print. This will help the children to look for clues in the pictures and we will look for perhaps our sound of the week and find a word that begins with that sound. That will be a very particular literacy time,

but they will also have times when an adult just reads a story to them.’

- Bialystok (1991) suggested that, ‘reading requires symbolic knowledge of letters. The representation must include the relation between the letter and its sound.’ (p.78) (cited in Riley, 1996 (p.13)) The following example clearly reflects the above comment.

‘And when they found another friend or another person making that sound they had to hold their hand and sit down so each group was making a phonic sound. And then they showed me their letter shape and just by doing fun activities like that they actually learnt all the letter sounds. And when they learn their letter sounds they can actually read most words unless you get the tricky words that they can’t sound out. But if they know this book and they learn phonics in a fun way they can actually read lots of words.’

(Reception Class teacher)

In Question Four respondents were asked how they assessed children’s progress in terms of reading. Three different approaches appeared to be in use.

Lally (1991) suggested that assessment is linked with the definition of objectives and teaching them in such a way as for teachers and pupils to know what is required of

them (i.e. what counts as achieving the objective). The assumption is that complex knowledge can be broken down into its constituent parts with hierarchies of learning being established and learners encountering and mastering 'simple' facts and concepts before moving on to learn more complicated material. This sort of model seems to underpin the policy makers' view of the incremental organisation of the National Curriculum into levels of achievement through which pupils should progress during their period of compulsory schooling. The publication of Desirable Outcomes (DfES/SCAA 1996) also set out learning objectives for six areas of learning which had to be achieved by most children by the age of five. The claims that Private Day Nursery practitioners made approached assessment as a way of meeting the Desirable Outcomes requirements. Specifically they claimed the following:

'Well we have development records, they are in here, I can show you. Because they are so young, I think things like speaking and listening, reading, we start off by looking at how they hold the book appropriately, they turn the pages appropriately so they are not turning it back to front, they are turning it the right way, tell the story from memory so you know that they can recall the story. Use their memory to match familiar words like "McDonalds" or their name or friends' names. Recognising the letters and shapes and sounds. Just starts off by the letters in their names. Can read familiar words in a text such as their name. Can read simple text labels, signs and so on.

So basically that is what we try and achieve with our children because they are so young.'

Educators who worked at Nursery Classes attached to Primary Schools emphasised the diagnostic element in the assessment process. They seemed to suggest that the teacher-learner interaction goes beyond the communication of results and teachers' judgements of progress, and the provision of additional instruction, to include a role for the teacher in assisting the pupil to comprehend and engage with new ideas and problems. Torrance and Pryor (1998) suggested that it is important to identify not just what pupils have achieved but what they might achieve with the help of an adult or a collaborating peer in the zone of proximal development. Thus learning should be scaffolded, with the purpose and focus of assessment being what children could achieve next. One of the implications of such an approach would be that teacher and pupil collaborate actively to produce a best performance. Such an interpretation of assessment has the merit of identifying an integrated role for assessment in the learning process itself. Pollard and Tann (1987) described the potential of the teacher's role as 'the extended professional who is able to link classroom practice and educational theory'. (p.xi) These ideas are reflected below.

'Most Nurseries and schools already, and have done for a long time, do a form of observation when they first come in to see where the children are, so that they can plan for where to move them. And I don't think I am quite happy with the idea of Baseline in that way to

be used for planning so that you know where the children are and to move on.'

For Reception Class teachers, assessment was an ongoing process based on observation. They used formal assessment where specific attainment targets had to be met by the children. At the same time they seemed to suggest that despite the fact that assessment is specific, it could facilitate the ability of the child to participate in learning. The learner is a learner in action and assessment is about participation in whatever is provided and defined as learning. Dispositions to learn, which include independence and self-motivation, must be assessed, according to Bertram and Pascal (2002). These dispositions are learned but are rarely acquired didactically and are central not only to educational achievement but also to personal fulfilment. Reception Class teachers also seemed to agree with Hurst (1997) who claimed that children can tell us about themselves 'through their behaviour, and there are clues to be found as to how we can best teach them, in their conversations and social interactions, in the stories they bring from home, and in the way they use opportunities to explore new areas of learning'. (p.81) These ideas are clearly reflected below:

'Well they all start at the same level, presuming they don't know any words. Some children will pick them up very quickly. And we are just about to assess which children can have a reading book, those who have already learnt the words. And I know some children

haven't because when we sit down and share their little picture books and their reading games, it is the words that they are learning. Some of them don't know the words, whereas others are reading them very quickly. So I assess them individually for that.'

'Well Baseline Assessment will assess their letter knowledge, their phonics, whether they recognise the letter on the page and could tell me the sound but it did not really help – it showed whether they were interested in books. They did not really give you much other knowledge. So we in Reception have to do it individually, to assess their word knowledge and whether they are ready to have a reading book and, if we think they are, the learning assistant or myself will give them a reading book.'

Question Five attempted to discuss the approaches to teaching reading that educators chose to follow on the basis of the qualifications that they held. On this understanding practitioners were asked if they felt capable of teaching reading. Given that more than one pathway is offered to become an early years practitioner, the aim behind this question was to discuss if their pre-service training increased their confidence in teaching reading. Once again commonalities appeared in the views held amongst Private Day Nursery practitioners and those who worked in Nursery Classes attached to Primary Schools.

The QCA (1999b) suggested that 'NVQs... are suitable for those that can provide evidence of competence in the workplace. The Level 2 qualifications are designed for those working under supervision, whereas the Level 3 NVQs cover the competence required of those working without supervision.' (p.6) In Private Day Nurseries, according to Neaum and Tallack (1997), 'Staffing will vary from establishment to establishment but there must be, by law, some qualified nursery nurses among the staff'. (p.6) With regards to the training of the educators who work in Nursery Classes attached to Primary Schools, in the first setting the educator was a qualified teacher supported by an NNEB and an NVQ Level 3 holder, whilst in the second there were three nursery nurses. Finally in the third, the interviewee was a qualified teacher who had twenty years' experience in both Nursery and Reception Classes. This is reflected below:

'In Nurseries now in Coventry I think it is 75% of staff have to be trained. We have got two staff that are NNEB. One that is a BTEC. One that is coming with an NVQ3 and I have finished my NVQ3 in child care and education and I am also an NVQ assessor.'

Abbott and Hevey (2001) argued that three main issues hinder the training of early childhood practitioners. 'Most of the training is short-term setting specific and at a less than NVQ Level 3 or A Level equivalent. Lack of resources significantly restricts the availability of training opportunities. Finally there is a third factor that might be described as "barriers to access". Lack of time on top of the basic working

week alongside lack of information, availability and flexibility of courses are some of the main barriers behind the training of the staff.' (pp.184-185) These concerns were reflected by the Private Day Nursery practitioners when they claimed:

'We go and do extra training as well. Myself and Beverley as pre-school have both done the foundation training for the curriculum document and I have also done the requirement with assessment and.... for the early years as well. That was just before the summer holidays. If training comes up we will go on it. But it is being able to access the training sometimes which is difficult. Especially with it being a small Nursery we have got to get somebody else in to cover myself or Beverley if we go off on training. That can sometimes be difficult and a lot of training is done in the daytime.'

Bowman, Donovan and Burns (2001) indicated that the training of the early childhood practitioners is a patchwork of pre-service and in-service education opportunities and credentials, characterised by varied requirements and roles. Learning through participation is a very powerful model of learning that has dominated the training of early childhood practitioners. The knowledge of practice is understood, used and developed in the context of practice. These ideas are reflected in the comments made by Reception Class teachers.

‘I left school at sixteen. I did two years of nursery nursing, which is called an NNEB and it is to work with children under five. So I went to college for two years and I had placements where I went out and worked in Nursery Schools and Playgroups and basically with any child under the age of six or eight, so I have had lots of experience there and I actually learnt the development of the child. So I learnt basically a child inside out. And from that I was able to see how they learn what their first steps should be.’

‘When I was eighteen I qualified as a nursery nurse and for a whole year I went round lots of Coventry schools as a supply nursery nurse and worked in Nurseries across Coventry in Special Needs Schools. Then I got a job in a Nursery and worked there for three years, teaching three and four-year-olds, which is the step before Reception. From there I went to university for three years and specialised in Key Stage One, which is Reception Years One and Two and did three different school placements. And one was in a Reception Class. So in all I had eight years experience before I even became a teacher. And this is my second year of teaching.’

Finally, in Question Six respondents were asked their opinion about Curriculum Guidance for the Foundation Stage (QCA 2000), the newest legal document about early years practitioners. Despite the fact that the document was not in effect when

the research was conducted, the aim of the question was to comment on the first reactions of the practitioners towards the newest governmental suggestions. Practitioners seemed to be hesitant towards the new document, but overall they were in favour of the effort. The Curriculum Guidance for the Foundation Stage (QCA 2000) defines the role of adults as including 'teaching'. This, according to Siraj-Blatchford et al. (2002), is underlined by assessment and planning. This idea is reflected in the comments made by Private Day Nursery practitioners who argued that the Curriculum Guidance for the Foundation Stage (QCA 2000) enabled the educator to recognise children's strengths and weaknesses and prepare activities suitable to the children's stage of development. Some of the practitioners asked for more time to acquaint themselves with the document.

More specifically they claimed:

'It is good because it is the stepping-stone document so you can see what is expected of a child. You can see what the child's strengths and weaknesses are likely to be and after that you can gear topics and activities that will help them to develop to the stage where they should be when they get to the end of Reception Year, which is when they go up to the next stage.'

DES (1990) suggested that, 'Play that it is well planned and pleasurable helps children to think, to increase their understanding and to improve their language

competence. It allows children to be creative, to explore and investigate materials, to experiment and to draw and test their conclusions... Such experience is important in catching and substantiating children's interests and motivating their learning as individuals and in co-operation with others.' (para.11) The importance of play in children's learning is reflected in the comments of respondents who worked in Nursery Classes attached to Primary Schools. They argued that the Curriculum Guidance for the Foundation Stage (QCA 2000) promotes the importance of play as a means that facilitates the learning of concepts, as well as information and skills. As a result the document raised the profile of the early years practitioners.

Specifically they claimed:

'I think especially in the Nursery, in some schools, not in all schools but in some schools, it has been very much seen as anybody can do Nursery – they just play, and the Foundation Stage. But by putting it together, by there being much more emphasis on what the children are learning, although it is through play, does give much more status to the early years practitioners.'

Anning and Edwards (2004) suggested that the 'goal of an informed community of practice is important for the development of educare as a new form of professional practice. If understandings of practice come through practice itself, forward looking change has to start simultaneously with changes in practice as well as changes in

ways of thinking about practice.’ (p.222) Some of the difficulties in changing the rationale of early childhood practitioners are reflected in the comments made by respondents who worked in Nursery Classes attached to Primary Schools. They questioned the feasibility of the suggestions included in the document on the grounds of the children’s young age. They argued:

‘I don’t quite know why we decided – I can see why it is done there because it is quite a good document to have defining what the children have learnt at quite an early age coming into the school. Perhaps it gives teachers more time to work on strengths and weaknesses. They can set targets easier at that time. Some of the children may be a little bit young. Some of them may only just be four. It is quite young for them to be in full-time education sometimes but I suppose it has got to start somewhere. And they have decided to do it there so I think you just have to go with what has been decided sometimes and make the best of it.’

Bowman, Donovan and Burns (2001) suggested that ‘developing expertise requires both a foundation of factual knowledge and skills and a conceptual understanding that allows facts to become “usable” knowledge’. The Curriculum Guidance for the Foundation Stage (QCA 2000) presents the principles of Early Childhood Education while at the same time offers examples of good practice and advice on working towards curriculum aims and goals. These ideas are reflected in the comments made

by Reception Class teachers who mentioned that the suggestions regarding planning in the document were easy to follow, and most importantly the document offered recognition and status to the work of early years practitioners.

‘I think it is excellent and it has given us status. It has raised the profile of early years teaching and because we are a separate Key Stage we have our own Key Stage co-ordinator. And I think it is good. It has given us high profile which is what we need, more recognition within the school. We are not just the Cinderella of the school on our own with little things that play all day. We have now got a structure to follow. The planning is good, it is made easier to understand, it is easier to do – excellent!’

From the interviews there appeared to be two issues (in addition to those mentioned above) on which all practitioners placed great emphasis. These were Baseline Assessment and play.

Assessment includes all the ways of establishing what children know and can do. Hall and Abbott (1991) suggested that, ‘The Education Reform Act (1988) defined Attainment Targets as the knowledge, skills and understanding which pupils are expected to have at the end of each Key Stage’. (p.21) Whitehurst and Lonigan (1998) suggested that, ‘The skill and knowledge base of emergent literacy include the domains of language, conventions of print, beginning forms of printing,

grapheme-phoneme correspondence, and phonological awareness'. Finally Browne (1998) suggested that, 'The key skills of reading are those strategies that help children to read with understanding, fluency, accuracy, and enjoyment'. In the National Curriculum Programme of Study (DfES 2000) they are identified as: 'phonic knowledge, graphic knowledge, word recognition, grammatical knowledge, contextual understanding'. (p.17) These ideas are reflected below:

'A lot of the work that is done in Nursery does prepare the children [for Baseline Assessment]. We don't set out to coach them specifically for Baseline. What we set out to do is to help their early literacy skills. And a lot of the things that I have already mentioned, being able to hold a book, those kind of things, knowing the difference between print and pictures, are part of the Baseline Assessment, so yes we will have covered those but we don't look at Baseline and think right, "I have got to coach my children for this particular target". We actually look at where we feel the children need to go and move on from there.'

'Well Baseline Assessment will assess their letter knowledge, their phonics, whether they recognise the letter on the page and could tell me the sound, but did not really help – it showed whether they were interested in books. They did not really give you much other knowledge. So we in Reception have to do it individually to assess

their word knowledge and whether they are ready to have a reading book and if we think they are, the learning assistant or myself will give them a reading book.'

Abbott (2003) suggested that, 'the diagnostic value of play cannot be over-emphasised. Close observations of children in play guards against unrealistic expectations being placed upon them. Interaction with children in play that is well planned and purposeful allows staff to monitor not only the children's progress, but also their own success in achieving the goals they have set. Careful recording provides evidence of progression and development in a range of areas, which neither more formal methods nor simple checklists will pick up.' (p.139) These ideas are reflected below.

Q You teach in a playful way?

A 'Yes.'

Q So you acknowledge play as an important part of your day?

'We find that play is the most important part and we find that children get the most out of play. Most of our activities are play-based. We don't really sit the children down with books, pens and paper. We try and encourage the aspect of play and some to mix as a

group, to instigate their own play situations as well as for us to obviously take the lead in that. But play to me is the most important thing.'

Anning and Edwards (2004) suggested that 'socio-cultural approaches are clearly rooted in Vygotskian perspectives and therefore emphasise how adults can support children as they learn. Children learn what is important through interactions with more experienced others.' (p.7) The important role of adults is further exemplified in the Italian pre-schools, in Reggio Emilia. Warm, supportive relationships underpin all the work with children but the scaffolding of learning is never underestimated.

As stated in the Curriculum Guidance for the Foundation Stage (QCA 2000) effective learning involves:

- Children initiating activities that promote learning and enable them to learn from each other.
- Children having time to explore ideas and interests in depth.
- Children feeling secure, which helps them to become confident learners.
- Children learning in different ways and at different rates.
- Children making links in their learning. (pp.20-21)

A play-based approach was suggested by all practitioners as the appropriate way of introducing children, not only to reading, but also to every piece of information or topic that the practitioners wished to cover. Practitioners used games in order to create or take advantage of teachable moments that would emerge from daily

experiences (David et al., 2000 (p.46)). All practitioners also tried to, a) create a strong link and a sense of continuity between Nursery and Reception, and b) to 'differentiate' as much as possible in an attempt to meet the children's diverse needs. But David (2001) suggested that although it seems important to promote the adoption of play approaches in learning and teaching in the early years, 'it must be recognised that many early years practitioners have limited training and the imposition of learning goals and inspection regimes can often lead to a retreat into more formal methods owing to a lack of confidence in practitioners' own abilities'. (p.64)

Wertsch (1978) (cited in Clay, 1998) suggested that, 'regulation by another is not the only precursor to self-regulation for children make their own contribution to their learning process'. (p.77) The structure of the day was flexible in all the settings and depended largely on children's choice. But in every case there was one structured teaching point initiated by a nursery nurse, or a teacher as appropriate. From this it can be implied that participants in this study possibly worked along the lines of the Vygotskian perspective where the child is an 'active co-constructor of knowledge' (Riley, 2003 (p.14)), where interactions help to structure ways of doing and thinking, and learning is mediated by interested others.

Pre-reading activities, which supported the enjoyment of literacy, were the main aim for practitioners who worked at Private Day Nurseries and Nursery Classes attached to Primary Schools. Practitioners viewed becoming literate as a process whereby

children's grasp of literacy develops with purposeful encounters with reading. On the contrary, Reception Class teachers wished for the children to become confident readers and they suggested a series of attainment targets towards achieving that. Their aims were in line with the suggestions made by both the Desirable Learning Outcomes (1996) and the National Literacy Strategy (DfES 1998) as well as the Curriculum Guidance for the Foundation Stage (QCA 2000), which was not in effect when the research was conducted.

Becoming a communicator is a key aspect in the new framework for children aged birth to three in England (Sure Start Unit 2002). Important experiences identified included the use of stories and songs in their home language, pretend play and symbolic understanding, and play experiences linked to storybook characters. Whitehead (1999) also included stories and narrative in her four essential strategies, which could provide a broad framework for the literacy curriculum. Clay (1998) provided a detailed account of the benefits of story telling. In her chapter 'Introducing story books to young readers', it was suggested that some of the teaching aims that can be achieved through story telling can include: model appropriate behaviour; probe for prior knowledge and understanding; introduce new knowledge; promote emerging skills. Also, Holdaway (1979) wrote of how 'children not thoroughly familiar with the syntactic patterns, idioms and tunes of written English... require the joyful repetition of a rich literature through the ear and across the tongue...[so that] the patterns of the book dialect are running through the automatic language system of the child'. (p.194) These are perhaps some of the

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reasons why story telling and big books were cited by the participants in this study as the most frequently used techniques for the teaching of reading, mainly from Private Day Nursery and Nursery Class practitioners. These techniques were used towards teaching name recognition, letter recognition and most importantly, phonics.

If understanding of practice in early years education comes through practice itself, then Anning and Edwards (2004) suggested that training could help practitioners in 'developing the capacity to see the educational potential in the activities shared with children, develop the capacity to respond to the demands they have identified as they work with children, and developing the ability to offer guided participation, which will facilitate the children's scaffolding process'. (p.222) With regards to training, all of the Private Day Nursery practitioners, as well as most of those who worked in Nursery Classes attached to Primary Schools, held vocational qualifications (NNEB, NVQ Level 3 or BTEC). All of them recognised the qualifications to be of a practical nature with the exception of BTEC, which was regarded as including theoretical elements as well. On the contrary, those who worked in Reception Classes were trained teachers who could be appointed to different classes every year. Despite the different career paths that led the practitioners into teaching, no one felt less confident about their abilities as teachers. What they all acknowledged instead was the need for constant in-service training in order to be informed about the current educational trends.

Johnston and Rogers (2001) suggested three purposes behind early literacy assessment legitimised by NAEYC. 'The first purpose of early childhood assessment is to plan instruction for individuals and groups and for communicating with parents. The second function is to identify children who may be in need of specialised services or intervention, and the final function is to evaluate how well a programme is meeting its goals.' (p.380) The results of this study indicate that to an extent participants tried to put into practice some of the mentioned purposes. Assessment took place in all the settings in the form of record keeping and observational notes. All practitioners worked in line with the suggestions of the Baseline Assessment Scheme but they emphasised that they used it only as an indicator for children's abilities and a framework for planning their teaching according to the children's needs.

Finally, all practitioners were in favour of the suggestions included in the Curriculum Guidance for the Foundation Stage (QCA 2000). Even though the practitioners asked for more time in order to familiarise themselves with the document, they commented that the structure was very easy to follow and it helped to realise the strengths and weaknesses of the children. Reception Class teachers lastly mentioned that the document gave status to the practitioners.

The aim of this section was to address how early years practitioners viewed their role as teachers of reading. The final section of this chapter consists of the presentation of the observation findings. They were regarded as a cumulative

collection of evidence related to children's learning, which was spread over a wide range of contexts. They were short narrative snapshots of classroom events that provided a framework, which encouraged practitioners to focus on aspects of learning and attitudes regarding reading.

4:4 Presentation of the observation findings

'Once we train ourselves to become keen observers, we can turn our attention to becoming shrewd interpreters of what we observe. What we see and what we think about what we will see will naturally raise questions in our minds about what action we might take. Identifying, recording, hypothesising, questioning, theorising and changing these are all part of the circle of discovery for every observer.' (Irwin and Bushnell, 1980 (p.3))

Nine non-participant observations were conducted during the spring of 2001 in early years settings in the area of Coventry. The aim behind the observations was to see if the teaching practices used by educators reflected their beliefs regarding the teaching of reading.

Notes were taken to record the kind of activities that took place. The observations in each case were determined by the research setting and the behaviour being observed. Educators were asked to select the sessions to be observed. This draws on narrative observations (Bruce, 2001) where the writer briefly explains the context of the

observations and then writes down a description (as exact as possible) of what the child says or does. It is later analysed and interpreted, and it can also be linked to educational theories to see if it challenges or supports research findings.

The observations were finally categorised in terms of setting type. There were three categories of settings: Private Day Nurseries, Nursery Classes attached to Primary Schools, and Reception Classes.

The observations prompted information about:

- The nature of the activities that were offered to the children;
- The organisation of the environment in which these activities were carried out;
- The organisation of time and resources in these settings.

Hurst (1997) suggested that the types of activities provided for children can have a strong influence on the attitudes they develop about learning.

Robson (1996) also argued that underlying the ways in which the nursery and school classroom environments are organised, are the philosophies of schools and teachers, and their beliefs about care and learning and the most effective ways of organisation for these. Many early years settings will inevitably contain a lot of similar apparatus, and may be organised in what physically seem to be quite similar ways. Any similarities, however, end there because it is 'the teacher who must translate

knowledge of children and pedagogy into classroom organisation and management structure to everyone's benefit. The vital elements that must be considered are:

- the physical context;
- structures (including routines) and resource management;
- rights, responsibilities and rules;
- behaviour;
- communication'. (Moyles, 1995 (p.35))

Morrow and Rand (1991) argued in favour of the influence of the physical classroom design and suggested that 'planned physical environment in early childhood classrooms can increase literacy development during free play periods'. (p.141) In considering the way space was used in these settings, practitioners appeared to be following a 'fitness for purpose' approach (Alexander, 1992). This involved creating spaces that were appropriate for the age and the stages of the children that were to use them, and also recognising the differing needs of young children.

A possible attempt to 'describe' an early years setting is to consider the space available as a range of clearly defined different areas, ordered partly according to the necessary 'house keeping criteria' and partly with a view to facilitating interesting associations and creative transformation of materials. The clearly defined areas are called 'activity centres' by Morrow and Rand (1991), and 'each different area is expected to foster a different kind of behaviour'. (p.143)

The following example that was observed in Private Day Nurseries as well as in Nursery Classes attached to Primary Schools reflects the idea suggested above.

The pre-school class is dominated by two big tables. One is full of books while the other is full of numbers and alphabet letters. The books are spread all over the class. Letters, capitals or lower cases, are easily visible through the Letterland poster. There are three shelves with writing resources and games.

Robson (2004) suggested that children need to have opportunities to be physically and mentally active in an environment that allows them to collaborate with others as well as offering them opportunities to play and work alone. Robson (2004), while reviewing research on features of children's learning, brought to the foreground their short attention span and the fact that 'curriculum arrangements must acknowledge both the inner or individual context and the outer social context of learning'. (p.207) It can be implied that these ideas appeared to reflect in all the settings given that the schedule of the day was focused around two main activities, one from the literacy and one from the numeracy areas. These activities lasted around twenty minutes each and the main point of each was repeated by the children in a ten-minute plenary session before they went home. The literacy activities that were observed will be discussed separately and in detail.

Moreover, all the early years classes were full of what Godwin and Perkins (1998) called 'environmental print'. Labels that either asked questions or gave information and helped children develop a sight vocabulary. In most cases teachers highlighted the key words in order to help children understand and remember. All the settings had notice boards, which were used as a demonstration to children of the purposes of print. 'Being aware of the environmental print and knowing that print has a communicative function are indicators of understanding the literacy task.' (Riley, 1996 (p.31)) Finally, attention to words in and out of context, common words in environmental print, children's names, labels, notices and signs are ways in which, according to Riley (1999) (p.92), sight vocabulary is acquired.

But the predominant kind of environmental print in all the early years settings were the displays, most of which had a specific reading focus. The displays were also used as thematic pegs and were almost always related to the weekly topic in discussion. Adams (1993) (cited in Riley, 1996 (p.14)) suggested that, 'correctly perceived and interpreted print conveys information. Children's concepts about print are strong predictors about the ease with which they will learn to read. Before formal instruction is begun children should possess a broad and general appreciation of the nature of print.' In support of this, displays were used to stimulate the children's interest and awareness and consolidate their understanding. Adults facilitated that by drawing the children's attention to them and used them to stimulate discussion and enquiry (Robson and Smedley, 1996).

In addition, in every setting easy access to books, plus a book corner, was offered to the children. Books were displayed attractively and invitingly with frequent changes to maintain interest. Wiggins and McTighe (1998) (cited in Bowman et al., 2001) suggested that the components of an emergent literacy curriculum can be satisfied in a manner that distinguishes between 'enduring understandings' that are critical to the development at a particular pre-school age, features that are important to 'know and do' and those that are 'worth being familiar with' but are less central. The cognitive concept of an illustration in a book serving as a symbol for the real object is an 'enduring understanding'. But also of enduring importance is 'the ability to have relationships that allow for book sharing and the ability to attend during a story. An environment that provides opportunities to children to pretend to read and learn to identify and handle books is positive.' (p.187) Finally Riley (1996) suggested that the books used should enable the emergent reader to 'enjoy literature, appreciate the unchanging nature of print, understand that the illustrations allow prediction of what is going to happen and appreciate the rhythm and repetition of the language'. (p.77)

Practitioners tried to offer as many different types of books as possible to the children. Amongst the types of books observed in the early years settings were:

- Rhyming storybooks
- Picture books
- Alphabet books
- Wordless picture books
- Books that deal with important themes

- Books where the illustrations matter
- Books that draw on existing knowledge
- Books with rhythm and rhyme.

Furthermore, when the children were given time to spare inside the class they were presented with a selection of materials, which in most cases were related to the main literacy or numeracy activity of the day. Clay (1998) suggested that, 'It may be best to have children develop many reading behaviours to a level of awareness without verbal analysis, in many cases leaving any dismembering until the behaviours become well established and children begin to regulate their own activity by becoming aware of what has already been going on under the direction of others'. (p.77) In the cases observed, the materials were allocated in a way that facilitated group learning. Having the children in groups facilitated observation, which in turn helped the practitioners root their beliefs in real life events. That way they could not only monitor children's progress, but also 'explain how and why they cared and educated as they did'. (Pugh, 1996 (p115)) As a result, practitioners were able to 'differentiate' and provide 'opportunities that motivated, supported and developed children and helped them to be involved, concentrate and learn effectively'. (QCA 2000 (p.17))

Finally, all teachers tried, to the greatest possible extent, to endorse within the classroom practices the early experiences that the children already had. The teachers also attempted to extend those experiences and offer a broader range of options.

Continued contact with parents was a specific feature of this effort and in most cases parents were willing to work with the teacher in achieving the best for the child. The work of Whalley (1994) as well as Government incentives such as Sure Start, demonstrated that when parents and practitioners work together the results were positive regarding children's development and learning. It is a process that should be based on openness, clarity, fairness, and accountability. Parents and practitioners working together in order to support the child form one of the principles of early years education. The findings of the Effective Provision of Pre-School Education (EPPE) Project suggested that the quality of the learning environment of the home (where parents are actively engaged in activities with children) promoted intellectual and social development in all children.

In the first section of this report all the commonalties that were recorded during the observations were presented. The second section will focus on the literacy activities that were offered to the children. Once again the observations will be categorised in terms of setting type.

Private Day Nurseries

Learning how to scan for letters embedded in print are, according to Clay's (1991) opinion, more significant learning gains than being able to name the symbols of the alphabet and give their sounds. 'It is a matter of knowing a letter as a distinct entity rather than whether you can pin a label on it. Before a child can attach a sound to a letter symbol s/he has first of all to be able to see the letter symbol as an individual

entity different from other symbols.’ (p.266) Bielby (1994) also argued that, ‘the alphabetic phase depends upon learning not only the letters of the alphabet but also the alphabetic principle that letters correspond to sounds. The child needs to learn both the shapes of the letters and the sounds they represent. Independent spelling is regulated by sounding out the letters to be written and so the nature of the alphabetic principle is reinforced.’ (p.70) Finally Riley (1996) suggested that blending phonetically regular two or three-letter words is one of the ways in which phonological development can be supported (p.37).

The following example clearly reflects the ideas suggested above.

One child cannot distinguish between the letters b and p. The teacher tells him to check where the line goes. Then the teacher asks for some names of animals starting with the letter p. She presents them with a series of pictures of animals, and asks them to put the ones with the initial letter of p in the middle of the table. Then the teacher gives out CVC cards and asks the children to read out the word given to them. Each time the children are asked if they can hear the ‘poor Peter’ in the word. Finally she asks the children to find the letter p on the Letterland board.

Private Day Nursery practitioners also chose to read the children’s favourite story aloud while they tried to emphasise the text. The Desirable Outcomes (1996) state

that children should 'listen and respond to stories', and 'make up their own stories'. (p.3) Godwin and Perkins (1998) also argued that, 'Knowledge about language is seen as the opportunity for children to reflect on their own and others' use of language within the framework of a curriculum where early language development is the provision of experiences where children are called upon to use language to create and communicate meaning'. (p.35) The children were not only considered as the recipients of stories, but as the creators, tellers and re-tellers of them. Finally Clay (1991) suggested that, 'When children are allowed to re-read familiar material they are being allowed to learn to be readers, to read in ways which draw all their language resources and knowledge of the world to put this very complex recall and sequencing behaviour into a fluent rendering of the text. The child is using a different kind of skill from the interactive sharing of the task. Now the support is coming from his/her own prior reading. The familiarity is supporting his/her move to further independence as a reader.' (p.184)

The following activity reflects the ideas suggested above.

All the children are now invited to go to the book corner and choose a book and look through the pages. The teacher allows a few minutes to pass and then chooses the children's favourite big book story and reads it slowly. The children know the story well and turn the pages when needed. The children discuss the plot lively while the teacher emphasises the text with a pointer.

Finally, in the Private Day Nurseries, practitioners worked on recognition of initial letter sounds. In order to achieve that, they used the Letterland scheme, which, according to Browne (1998), introduces children to upper and lower-case letters through pictograms and characters. The latter stages of it introduce letter strings with books containing stories about the letters (p.52). In addition Riley (1996) suggested that 'encouraging recognition of each letter of the alphabet by emphasising the letter shape, the correct formation and the sound, as well as helping the awareness of grapheme/phoneme (letter-sound) association through initial sound work starting with children's names' (p.35), are ways in which phonological development can be supported.

The following example clearly reflects the ideas suggested above.

The teacher takes the opportunity to work on the recognition of the initial letter of a child's name. Based on the Letterland scheme that they use for the teaching of phonics she asks the children whose name starts with Annie Apple, Eddie Elephant, Fireman Frank...etc. When all the children are able to correctly match their name with its initial letter, either on their own or with the help, the teacher tries using the Letterland scheme to guide the children into reciting the alphabet.

Nursery Classes attached to Primary Schools

Phonemic awareness, according to Clay (1998), has to do with 'sounds one hears, it has nothing to do with the letters one sees. Phonemic awareness is only part of a larger range of phonological awareness of the features in a language that allows speakers to signal differences by varying the sounds and sound patterns of oral language.' (p.57) Research has also demonstrated that phonemic awareness is necessary in learning to read and write. Adams (1990) concluded that 'children who fail to acquire phonemic awareness are handicapped in their ability to master print'. (p.412) Bielby (1994) finally suggested that key features of alphabetic processing include, 'learning the letters facilitates the perception that spelling represents sounds; the phonological discipline of spelling trains orthographic processing in systematic directionality; and orthographic segmentation and directionality train phonological processing in phonemic discrimination. These processes develop the ability to read new words by applying spelling-sound correspondence rules, the processing of words as letter sequences, and the processing of letter strings in phonological chunks.' (p.73)

The following example clearly reflects the ideas suggested above.

Teacher: Do you remember what letter we discussed last time?

Children: Mm.

Teacher: Give me an action for m.

The children do accordingly.

Teacher: Give me a word starting with m.

Children: Mum, Miss, Mia, Micky.

Teacher: What was the other letter we discussed last week?

Children: Uu.

Teacher: Give me a sound for u.

The children do accordingly.

Teacher: Today we are going to do two different sounds. Ff and th. They sound similar but they are not. We are going to use a ruler when we write them because they are hard ones to do.

The teacher asks a few children to copy what she writes on the blackboard.

Then she asks the children to think of a word beginning with f.

One of the children says 'Fun' and based on this the teacher continues.

Teacher: What sound does fun start with?

Children: F.

Teacher: With what sound does it end? F-u ...

The teacher waits for the children to respond and some of them say 'n'.

Teacher: And what is the long sound?

No response.

Teacher: Close your eyes and find it in your mind's eye. Close your eyes and sound it out. All together...

Teacher and Children: F-U-N.

When children are in the 'emergent literacy' phase of development, Riley (1996) argued that, 'the purpose of print and its conventions need to be constantly reinforced. Children in groups or individually can be reminded of how books function during every book-sharing activity. The teacher should clearly demonstrate that the print moves from front to back, where the text starts, the sweep back on line, and the sequence of familiar stories from pictures.' (p.32) Bielby (1994) also argued that an important step in learning to read is for the child to learn directionality. 'This is something that the child can only learn from watching experienced readers. Directionality in English is arbitrary and can only therefore be learnt as a convention. The adult who finger-points while reading is giving the emergent reader an essential lesson.' (p.149)

The following activity reflects the ideas suggested above.

The children are divided into two groups and choose one book each. The teacher reads the title and explains what the story is about. The children are left to skim through the books and turn the pages. All the children do that the correct way, and all of them attempt to 'read or tell' the story by looking through the pictures.

The teacher gathers all the children together and chooses a big book. She uses a pointer and asks the children to look at her. She slowly reads the story and points at the text as well as the main figures of the story.

According to Browne (1998), 'Graphic knowledge contributes to understanding since punctuation is also represented graphically, and these marks provide readers with important information about the meaning and structure of texts'. (p.27) At the same time, Riley (1999) suggested that the child 'needs constantly to confirm the accuracy of the predictions through attention to the meaning and the orthography (features of print), and if inaccurate, to self-correct, giving the responsibility of confirming the predictions to the child and allowing the child to use his/her awareness of the cues available to learn about how to make decisions about the most useful cues on different occasions. This realisation has to be achieved for meaning to be effectively and speedily reconstructed.' These are considered by Riley (1999) (pp.34-37) as effective strategies for supporting confirmation and self-correction skills.

The following activity reflects the ideas suggested above.

Big book activity. The book is called 'Six Diner Sid' by Inage More.

Teacher: On Monday we looked at full stops and capital letters.

When do we use a capital letter?

Children: For a name. At the beginning of a sentence.

Teacher: When do we use a full stop?

Children: At the end of a sentence.

Teacher: What about question marks?

Children: For questions.

Teacher: All week we have been talking about capital letters and full stops and we have discussed what we are to do if we are told that the cat had six meals. Now somebody came and hid some of the words. We will read the story and find out the missing words (*my, mum, dog, cat, play, big, dog, my, dad*).

The teacher reads the story and the children guess the hidden words.

Reception Classes

The first of the Reception Class practitioners chose what Browne (1998) called a 'response activity'. Browne (1998) argued that 'planned opportunities for discussions about texts can encourage children to reflect on what they read, discover interests, learn from their reading and from the interpretations of others. During response activities teachers are able to assess children's understandings, attitudes and interests.' (p.56)

Riley (1999) also suggested that shared reading involves 'active participation by the child who is supported into positive reading behaviours by the adult. During shared reading the child is not only learning the content and knowledge involved in the

book under discussion, but is also fulfilling the following learning objectives: the conventions about print, familiarisation with the conventions of punctuation, integration of illustration and text, the use of prediction as cueing strategy, and close attention to visual details of letters or groups of letters.’ (p.39)

The following activity reflects the ideas suggested above.

The teacher reads the next page and the children repeat what she says.

Teacher: Where do you think the shop is?

Children: There it is along the road.

Teacher: What can you buy in the post office?

Children: Stamps.

Teacher: Parcels can go too. But you have to know what country the parcel goes to.

The next picture is a bus stop.

Teacher: What are the people doing?

Children: Waiting for the bus.

Teacher: [reading] ‘In our street we have a bus stop.’ How many words are there in the title of the book?

[In our street]

One child: In our street.

Teacher: How do you know it says street?

One Child: It begins with s.

There is a play area [park] on the picture.

Teacher: How do we know it is not a play area? Yes it is beginning with p, like play area, but we are looking for only one word beginning with p but play area is two words.

All the children read the last page.

Teacher: What can you see in the picture? What is going to happen next? What is the lady wearing?

Clay (1998) suggested that, 'to read one has to know where to attend, in what sequence and what sorts of things the pictures and marks on the page can tell you'. (p.45) Print awareness is, according to Clay (1998), a general term which is used to include the visual features of print, often letter and word knowledge, as well as some concepts about how books work (p.47). These were called by Clay (1991) 'orienting behaviours which are learnt over a period of time'. At the same time Browne (1998) stated that in doing text level work according to the National Literacy Strategy (DfES 1998) requirements, children have to be supported to achieve a series of skills. 'This means knowing about written texts, the way they are structured, the way language is used and the information provided by the different parts of a text. It also means becoming aware of the vocabulary that is used to talk about print and reading, such as title and author.' (p.32)

The following activity reflects the ideas suggested above.

Big book activity.

Teacher: Can you point to the title for me? Where is the title?

Many children point to the title.

Teacher: What do you think the title would say?

Children: The name of the story.

Teacher: The author is...

Children: The person who wrote the story.

Teacher: Put your hand up if you can read any of the words on the front page.

The children are very noisy so the teacher tries to calm them and asks another question.

Teacher: Who can use the pointer to show me where to start reading?

All the children point to the correct side.

Teacher: Let's see what will happen if I start from the end.

She starts reading and after a few words asks the children whether they can understand. None of the children can understand the story.

Teacher: You are right; it is meaningless.

The teacher opens the book at the first page where the last word of the sentence is hidden. The phrase is 'I took my cat to see the vet'.

The teacher reads aloud, omitting the last word, expecting the children to guess it. The children remain silent.

Teacher: Let's look at the pictures because that is how we can know what the story might say.

Some of the children think a vet is a sort of doctor. There is lots of chatter amongst them.

Teacher: If you have something to say it is better to put your hand up so you do not disturb the others.

The children go quiet.

Teacher: Let's see if the first letter of the word is a 'c' or a 'v'.

The teacher reveals each letter and they read the word together.

Teacher: Let's have a go and read the whole sentence.

The activity ends.

All practitioners offered the children a print rich environment and made sure that easy access to a variety of books, in terms of content and size, was available to them. In Private Day Nurseries as well as in Nursery Classes attached to Primary Schools the structure of the day was not always clear and the children set the pace of the work that was to take place. The literacy or numeracy activity was the focal point of the day and the content was approached from different angles all day.

Contrary to that, in the Reception Classes the structure was clear and there were specific attainment targets met on every occasion.

Private Day Nursery practitioners focused on developing children's pre-reading skills. They did work on letter recognition by shape and sound, or initial letter sounds using children's names. The choices were in line with the Desirable Learning

Outcomes (SCAA 1996) for speaking and listening where it is stated that name recognition is considered as an indicator of successful development in language and literacy.

In addition, the recognition of initial letter sound is included in the Baseline Assessment Scheme (SCAA 1997) requirements as an indicator of phonological awareness. Also, hearing and identifying initial sounds in words is what children should be taught as part of their word level work in their Reception Year (DfES 1998).

Another topic of interest for children is that print conveys meaning. Having in mind that letter recognition is the first step to quicker identification of words and that leaves the reader more time to concentrate on the meaning of the text is a possible reason why intense provision is offered for this aspect of language and literacy. In addition, in the Desirable Outcomes (SCAA 1996), letter recognition is regarded as one way of helping children to acquire competence in English as soon as possible (p.3).

Finally, the contexts of the Nursery School, Nursery Class, and Day Nursery may be said to share a common ideology. 'The range of didactic methods was comparatively great, encompassing both formal instruction and discovery learning. In the Nursery, although a certain element of structure may be obtained, this tended to be covert; the emphasis was clearly on play as a method of knowledge and skill acquisition.' (Hutt

et al., 1989 (pp.227-228)) The claim made in the argument mentioned above was easily observed in every setting that was included in the research. The way that the activities were introduced to the children reinforced the emphasis on play.

On the other hand, in Reception Classes the activities used were mainly story telling, shared reading and big book. The teachers offered the children planned opportunities for discussion where they used guessing in order to work on pre-reading skills as well as help the children to decode and interpret the text. Guessing worked as a plausible hypothesis that helped children to predict and imagine as well as being involved in the text through identification with the situation. Finally, the teacher tried to make the children pay attention to the actual print and helped them to pick cues that facilitated the prediction of meaning.

Bruce (2001) suggested that even though the National Literacy Strategy (DfES 1998) and the Desirable Learning Outcomes (SCAA 1996) are largely prescriptive, they do not exactly state the activities that teachers are expected to provide. Thus they should be considered as a framework that aims to translate advice into practice through careful interpretation and planning. Bruce (2001) suggested that factors which influence practice may include: 'beliefs about the purposes of education, beliefs about how learners learn, beliefs about what reading is for, awareness of the short and long-term goals for teaching, teaching style, and understanding of the reading process'. (pp. 39-40)

Campbell (2004) also argued that, 'It is developmentally appropriate to utilise strategies linked to the children's interests and needs rather than attempting to directly teach particular learning goals. Learning needs to be the product of a wide range of activities and opportunities. Attention given to literacy goals is just part of this much wider provision. Goals should not be neglected but become part of a broad based literacy foundation.' (p.121) How the child learns is seen to be as important as what s/he learns. Katz (1992) (cited in Riley, 2003) suggested that 'the introduction of positive learning dispositions should be foremost in the early childhood educator's mind'. (p.17) Taking this into account the next chapter of this thesis will attempt to link the findings presented with the current trends of theory and research and examine early years practitioners' views regarding the teaching of reading on the following issues:

Play

Assessment

The importance of training

The nature of activities offered to children.